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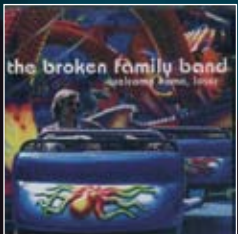


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editorial

I've been away for a few months in Seattle, researching a book on Nirvana.

Spent last night hanging with Lou Barlow. He's in town to promote a new solo album, *Emoh*. He was partly inspired to try a different approach after hearing M Ward's *Transfiguration Of Vincent*, moved by its simplicity and richness of tone. His songs are as heartfelt and slyly humorous as ever: 'The Ballad Of Daykitty' is my particular favourite, a playful chant lamenting the feline tendency to disappear 'til feeding time. He's still typically self-deprecating: commenting wryly at his in-store at Sonic Boom Records on the appropriateness that *Emoh* should be released the same day as the brace from Conor Oberst, publicly chastising himself for being too worried what critics will make of it. I kept wanting to yell out, "It's only one person's opinion", but I knew he would've engaged me in dialogue. It seems weird he should still be so insecure about his art, but of course that insecurity is what feeds it.

Later, we drank beer and cats lined up to have their tummies tickled while I turned him onto The Gossip – "Now, that's what I call Riot Grrrl," he excitedly remarked – the minimalist, dance-laden grooves of C.O.C.O., and Bettye Swann's sweet soul serenade. Of course, we both love Phil Elvrum's Microphones/Mount Eerie: so fragile, so human, so imaginative, such a deceptive mastery of sound.

If we sound like geeks it's because we are geeks.

The night before I had the great privilege of seeing Calvin Johnson perform: a man who gets mistaken for a geek but is anything but. His songs are rich with leopardskin magic and the art of seduction, and the knowledge that mystique is all: a new habit acquired of reading out news items or drawing out seemingly trivial statements for every ounce of humour offsets the darker moments wonderfully. He cracks himself up. His laconic drawl is a language in itself: "Can We Kiss?" he asks, all dangerous, dark-eyed Huck Finn pseudo-innocence as he sings of a heart fuelled by rabbit blood. He still casts a very long shadow indeed over Olympia.

If I sound like a fan it's because I am.

A few nights earlier, I saw local band Pretty Girls Make Graves stand at oblique angles to one another, and thrash their instruments with fury and determination – songs sprawling out in weird directions, singer Andrea inspirational as she shimmied around in her lace and jeans. They played like each note was their last, that music was the most important force in the world to them.

And sometimes that's enough.

And sometimes that can see you through.

And sometimes all you want to do is dance.

Or cry. Or make shapes. Or listen to the sound of girls being seduced. Or sit around drinking beer with an old friend, stroking cats until they writhe with pleasure, chatting about all the great new sounds coming from Sweden and the Pacific Northwest and Japan and England – hey, and this is a big shout out to The Long Blondes and The Diskettes for making my stay out here way more pleasurable than otherwise. It's more than I can do sometimes to keep from bursting with pride when I regard this magazine and all the fine work Frances and Andrew and Sarah and Daniel and Grace and Chris and everyone have done in my absence. (I had no part in putting together this issue.) Enjoy issue 4. I know I'm looking forward to reading it.

Everett True

Here's me, trying to interview Ben Chasny, aka Six Organs Of Admittance, at the 12 Bar last night.

I'm flustered and freezing cold; shadows under my eyes and a head like a very messy *Plan B* filing cabinet. I'm sitting opposite a guy who's armed with his nth beer and what appears to be a fearsomely quick wit. I look at him, wary.

"I love your music," I say. "But I can't think of anything to ask you about it."

The batteries on my minidisc run out.

"Ahhh, shit, OK, let me change those..."

I mumble, getting the ones out of my walkman and replacing the minidisc one.

The new batteries run out too, about a minute later.

Jesus.

Ben Chasny shoots me an owl glare.

Uncomfortable laughter all round.

"OK," I say. "So what are the six organs of admittance anyway? In order?"

Fuck it. My brain has turned to mush; I will ask the stupidest question I can think of.

He takes my pen and writes in my notebook.

You'll have to wait for the next *Loose Lips* to find out the answer. Suffice to say, it was a delightful answer, and I'll listen to his music with a deeper, spiritual understanding from now on in. Really.

Bad interviews aren't so bad sometimes.

Forgetting to switch the mic on for my first *Careless Talk* assignment was probably the best thing for both me and my readers, on account of it being an interview with the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion and all. As a result of this, I always tell contributors just to go with it, work with the situation in hand, *improvise*, man. I have no idea what they think of this, mind, apart from Doug Mosurock, who once told me, "I never jam" – and his precise, passionate words on Arthur Russell are tribute to the other approach. I just know what works for me.

Chasny's Six Organs set, appropriately, nudges the edges of chaos and throws up sweet, intelligent, ramshackle constructions, shelters built of driftwood and ideas. I also tell writers to write like the music sounds: luckily, this music sounds utterly lovely right now. Problem solved, then. In theory.

Everett says he hasn't had much to do with this issue. This isn't true. He phoned me up a fair amount, often as I was trying to move house. ("Hey Frances... Can you get this Swedish band for the next issue? Their PR's... Oh. It's... I think it's this... Look, I have to go out now; I'm doing a gig with Pete Bagge and Calvin Johnson...") He chose and wrote the cover story – and what a cover story. It's the most sideways, unlikely and, in some ways, brave cover we've had yet.

But this issue of *Plan B* really belongs to Sophie Heawood. She let me edit most of issue 4 from her living room, after I got made homeless recently. I can't thank her enough. She rules.

Frances May Morgan

Apology: The photograph of C-mone in issue 3 was wrongly credited to Anthony Wallace. It was actually taken by Cat Stevens.

For more reviews, staff blogs, forum, and features visit www.planbmag.com and our partners in crime *loose lips sink ships* magazine at www.11ss.tv



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live



white light

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**To spin
heavy rock
this far into
the unknown
is an act of faith**

Comets On Fire/Julian Cope Royal Festival Hall, London

Even though the rock star's wearing denim jeans, a strong waft of leather-kekkekness has wandered idly to Seats 2 & 3, Row E, Upper Stalls. Julian Cope has decided that tonight's happening will open and close with a set from the Arch-Drude himself, accompanied by his band of merry pranksters. This is a virgin experience for these ears. Sure, I know the horn-blare pop of 'Reward' and 'World Shut Your Mouth', but, while the myths surrounding his post-pop descent into addled sonic madness are alluring, I've not managed to hear any until now. And...

And it's pretty appalling, actually. Cope's many peculiar accents and Pythonesque lampoon of the rock'n'roll frontman's swagger doesn't redeem the Stetson parked ludicrously upon his thinning bonce. Similarly, while a noisenik perched upon a bank of synths ensures that the band forever threaten to spin out into space, the clunky, clichéd klang of their guitars – all typical tones and postured rock grrr – keep them locked into some pastiche of the past as Cope's spotlit bluster tumbles gracelessly across Tap's keenly-guarded clever/stupid border. He's like Jim Morrison for *Red Dwarf* fans, a buffoonish and unthreatening Olde English Eccentric fronting a band who sound like Can, only badly filtered, like Can channelled by the Cult at their most mannered.

For the true kinetic freakout tonight, you have to journey to the *centre*, to the hirsute knuckle-draggers who are second on the bill, but first in my heart. While his self-aware Rock Show does nothing for me, Cope wins my eternal respect for his influential and fervid championing of Santa Cruz's Comets On Fire, a gang of diesel-huffing riff-mongers whose banks of antique noise-manipulation gizmos send their tumescent thrusts of electricity contorting through the dimensions, twisting and trashing the charring guitars and hallucinatory vocals until they've been bruised into fabulous, unearthly new shapes.

Earlier in the week I saw them slay 60 people in a room above a Brighton pub, their droning, dub-obiterated metal like a primal chant, fluorescent and sparkling noise, like holy white light, flooding the room and purifying us, a real shared experience. What the Royal Festival Hall delivers in terms of exemplary sound and grand surroundings is diminished slightly tonight by the fact that three-quarters of Cope's *Bottom*-loving, *Dungeons-&-Dragons*-playing, Geography teacher fanbase exit the auditorium to go hassle ye stoute yeoman at the barre, scared batshit by the truly terrifying noise

that's crackling through this historic barn, where the ghosts of its greatest classical and avant garde musical performances are joined tonight by this most classicist, avant garde collective.

I'm glad those losers scarpered. While the sheer, breakneck, extreme lunacy of Comets On Fire – the way their second album, *Field Recordings On The Sun*, pursues a hippy stoner psychedelic heavy rock to the absolute nth degree – does initially stimulate bemusement, their acts of noisenik brinkmanship need a roomful of true believers, not sceptics, to truly electrify. To spin heavy rock this far into the unknown is an act of faith.

The focus of the recordings is instantly ditched for a furious, desperate, but ever-controlled chaos. The chill-out segues and vignettes of third album, *Blue Cathedral*, have been left in the studio – Comets live are a band of impressive intensity and density, a circus act of riff-playing daring. They open with 'Antlers Of The Midnight Sun', their most atrociously ugly detonation, but soon the acrid knob-twiddling of Noel Harmonson ensures that his bandmates' Sabbath-meets-Stooges ramalama is competing with a phantasmagoria of conjured drones and screees, Echoplexes and oscillators sending them hurtling into a hall of mirrors, and taking us with them.

It's a glorious riot, guitarist Ben Chasny rolling on the floor, caving new noises from his guitar, frontman Ethan Miller shredding his strings and his throat in a single, ecstatic stroke, drummer Utrillo Kushner tearing loose at his kit in one unbroken Keith Moon barrage, bassist Ben Flashman holding it all together with walls of subsonic authority. It's a non-stop freakout, the songs swiftly obliterated by the free-form flak of feedback and distortion, sounding like laser cannons pulsing into the earth from an armada of marauding Martians. It begins, and for 40 or so minutes it just, doesn't, stop.

Of course, billowing monster 'The Black Poodle' closes the set, like all the riffs from Sabbath's Vol. 4 collapsing in on each other, its acidic blur as bitter and blotting as the first chew on a magic mushroom, until the last cymbal crash dissolves, the last guitar tumbles loudly to the floor, Ethan's gentle "Thanks" belying the monstrosity that has preceded.

Whiteout. Glorious. We don't stay for Cope's second set.



the bottom line

Words: **Everett True**
Photography: **Anthony Wallace**

Everett True meets **Lydia Lunch**

"I always bring my prophylactic along on tour against other people's germs – the mic cover. If you smell mics, you know why. They're raunchy. When you're as intimate with a mic as I am, you use a prophylactic. With gloves and a prophylactic, you're fine. You never lose your voice."

So I finally get to meet Lydia Lunch.

Recently, I read a comic book – Bob Fingerman's depiction of struggling, amoral NYC artistic sorts, *Minimum Wage* – in which the main character's fiancée objects to his hooking up with Lydia. "Not that pornographer," she spits.

I've never thought of Ms Lunch as a temptress or sexual predator. This, despite the infamous Eighties series of Richard Kern films, wherein she gets butt-fucked with a gun. This, despite the fact I had a poster of her gothic countenance in Teenage Jesus And The Jerks glaring down from my student residence wall. This, despite the fact that Lydia bases her entire oeuvre around sex: passion, betrayal, anger, death, lust.

Maybe I submerge my desire beneath the mantle of 'art'. It's always the process of seduction that interests me: the music. Teenage Jesus, Lydia's first band – she was 16 – encapsulate NYC 1978 better than any band this side of Television. She followed that up with – my God, it makes me feel *dirty* to even whisper its name – 1980's slinky and lustful *Queen Of Siam*, and two decades of disturbing, abrasive harangues.

What attracts me to Lydia? Her brutal candour: she is unembarrassed by both sexuality and honesty. She exerted tremendous influence on my formative years: at the start of the Nineties, I even made another artist over, almost entirely in her image. Yeah, Lydia is to blame...

But about eight years back I left one of her shows halfway through: she was making me question too much about my life. I understood her bottom line: there is no bottom line. I also understood that to act upon that realisation would've been to turn my back on everything, everyone.

When I was in Olympia WA recently, all the late-night talk was of 'hate sex', like indie kids have just discovered it...

"...20 years later! I'm glad the general public is catching up. What can I say? Passion turns ugly. When something is so all-consuming, the bottom is going to drop out. Is hate sex the beauty of mutely satisfying, stimulating, sweet loving sex? Certainly not. Sometimes the person you hate the most fucks you the best. I don't know why. Bastards."

The worst insult you can give anyone is to call them nice.

(Laughs) "Exactly. In a rock'n'roll terminology, hate sex is a very male-dominated thing, so if women or girls now understand what this is, maybe they're using it as a revenge thing because hateful men have revenged them. It's just the objectification of sex – that's what the whole groupie thing is. Fuck them and then forget them. It's a good way for teenage girls to pass their time."

I've never been much one for truth.

"Exactly. Memory changes everything. And the body of my entire work is to reinterpret what just happened, and of course it's going to be perverted by the very nature of what recollection is. One of my lines about myself is that I'm the ultimate in contradictions. I do not fear contradiction at all. This is what's got me in more arguments in relationships than anything: there is no bottom line! People really don't want to fucking hear that – that's driven more of them insane more than anything else. The bottom line is relative."

Stop right there. I cannot go past this point. Let's talk about something else.

(Laughs) "...So you're looking for some contradiction, make the article a little bit more interesting! Sure. If there is a bottom line for you, good luck! It's only someone who's insecure who needs to know where the complete finite is. Everything is in flux. Accept it."

Do you separate yourself from your art?

"No. What I do comes so naturally. I'm not struggling with anything – especially words. I don't have notebooks of lyrics or songs. I don't write one fucking line I don't use. I do this because I have to, because if I didn't I wouldn't know what I would do. I feel like I have been designated to say these things in this fashion because there obviously is a minority who feels some of these feelings. What saved me was that I always knew I was speaking to a minority so therefore I was never frustrated by the linear nature of my popularity or record sales. My greatest art is being able to survive every day, and not being a miserable cunt. I don't live my daily life in anger because then they'd win! They would win."

Was Teenage Jesus your first artistic venture?

"I'd done a few poetry readings when I was about 14, at parties. I would harangue Lenny Kaye with poems outside CBGBs. He was very tolerant. It was the first orchestrated onslaught."

Did you have a clear idea what you wanted to do with Teenage Jesus?

"I wanted it to sound like a rebellion against everything else. I don't know how I knew this at 17. I knew had to do something. I was very driven, mainly out of a primal urge to scream."

It's very liberating.

"The lyrics were very important, even then. I had no concept of what music was,

'If you don't have a vision, don't give it a fucking sound'

other than what I liked, which I didn't want to imitate. The music had to be dictated by the words. Of course it was instinct, but it was also control. It was very important to me that Teenage Jesus was a really precise outfit because when you're so minimal you can't be sloppy. We rehearsed to death. Mistakes were met with a coathanger. It had to be tight. That was the nature of the material. It was a precise primal scream. I still love playing the guitar. I just won't do it in public. It's an ugly instrument that should not hang around my fucking neck. I hate guitars. When you can find someone who's a genius on one, it's very rare. There are geniuses: Bob Kline, Rowland S Howard. Treat it with disrespect."

Do the bare minimum and move on. Play one chord, one note. That's all you need.

"Or preferably one slide – with a very long note screeching from it."

I hate most guitar sounds. It's a central contradiction to my craft: that I once made a living from writing about something I hate.

"I make a living espousing about everything I hate. My favourite instrument is the saxophone. It can drive the voice more than a guitar."

What was your motivation for forming Teenage Jesus?

"To scream in people's faces. That's it. It wasn't to get noticed. I was noticed before I picked up a fucking guitar because I was so aggressive and arrogant and young. People avoided me in New York. People like Richard Hell and David Byrne were horrified: 'Get back, you little beast!' They were 10 years older and didn't know what I was."

What drives you now?

"I still think there's a void that no one else is filling, especially from a female point of view. I feel a philosophical duty, an intellectual duty, a social duty, for the people who are passion-obsessed, politically obsessed, frustrated, over-sensitive to the



point of insensitive. I feel a duty to literature and to language, because I don't see anyone filling this void. Literature is what inspired me in the first place – the writing of Genet and Miller. In spite of the fact I started writing when I was 12, music seemed the most obvious way to push it out there. No one was doing spoken word back then."

Do you feel your influence on other artists?

"I wish. Where? Can you tell me some? If you think some have been influenced by my attitude – OK, maybe, but by my work? I don't think so because it seems like the women who are so-called influenced use traditional, horrible rock or punk rock to claim my influence. I never played punk rock music! It's simplistic. It's stupid. I hate the fashion. I hate everything about it. I know why it existed and I respect that it existed, but I don't respect the bands that created the music, especially in England where it was a political movement. There was no vision in the music. If you don't have a vision, don't give it a fucking sound."

Isn't that the nature of influence? That people redefine the originators' art?

"What is my influence on them? You tell me. You're standing outside it."

A certain attitude...

"How cool! How fucking cool! Oh, my attitude is what they pick up on! It's such a fucking insult. Look at the body of my fucking work, and the diversity of it, and the subjects I'm dealing with, and the language I'm using, and the stamina I have, and the survival mechanism I use...and you're just going to adopt my fucking attitude? Fuck off! It's so petty. It could be my fucking hairdo! I can take no responsibility for the influencing of angry women – be angry, that's great! But that's all I'm fucking giving? Get the fuck out of here! Go read a book. It's not like my goal is to be as some stupid icon. My goal is to lend a bit of relief to people that share a similar dystopian attitude. My influence can be felt when I'm fucking dead – like the Marquis de Sade."

I asked the same question of Keith Richards once: "Keith, no disrespect, but don't you ever feel guilty at this vast pantheon of *crap* – rock'n'roll – that you directly inspired and helped create?"

"Poor Keith. There are so many horrible guitar players – and he was great! And it wasn't only his guitar playing, but his attitude, his look, his lifestyle. Can you imagine, your *lifestyle*? Ultimately, let them go. Anyone who finds any influences or finds solace in the fact I exist...that's great. I'm not looking for an army of Lydias to

'All I ever wanted to do was to leave my own skid mark through history'

go out there and create dissonant music, ranting and raving about subjects that until now have been the domain of male writers. I don't need it. It doesn't stroke my ego – as a matter of fact, nothing strokes my ego, nor does it destroy it. Good reviews, bad reviews...it doesn't matter. I know what I'm looking for. It's public therapy. That's all.

"When I was young I thought I'd be a therapist – or a surgeon, because I love surgery. It's one of my fetishes. I'd be a great – or a terrible – therapist because I've never felt a moment of guilt in my life. That Catholic guilt I should have felt? By the age of 10, I'd whitewashed it. I'm kind of sociopathic that way. Maybe I should run for office: I don't feel guilt, just like a politician."

You'd make a great politician, especially with the papers digging into your past.

"What can they dig out that I haven't already admitted? It's something I take great pride in. I know that anything I do, no matter how devious or disgusting it might appear to anyone else, if I don't document it, you're not going to see it. If it's documented, I'll show you everything.

You're not going to find me sloping around the fucking gutter on a Saturday night: very anti-Courtney Love, a train wreck crashing into a bank, poor thing. What a monster, hmmm?"

Ah, Jesus. I don't feel any guilt there.

"She's the one that needs to feel the guilt. I love that Courtney exists, and it's bizarre because she came after me. At one point, I might have been everything that she wanted to be, but now she's everything I don't want to be, and that's beautiful."

Why are you so aggressive on stage?

"I just can't fucking help it. Look at the subjects I'm dealing with! What, I'm a fucking comedian now? I know I'm funny, but why isn't anyone laughing? It's serious subjects, heavy passion. You can't speak about them without getting enraged."

Why don't you do stand-up?

"I'd love to, but I don't understand comedy. I don't laugh. I like Steven Wright. Bill Hicks is great comedy, but what's the difference between that and me? How did Rollins become comedy? The difference between comedy and my music is that in comedy they allow you to laugh. They give you pauses. I don't give the audience that luxury."

Also, comedians are mostly created from hyper-insecure social retards. They parade their insecurities and hope there's enough of an audience out there who can identify with them.

"What's wrong with being a tragedian? I think I'm pretty fucking funny in day-to-day conversation, but why should I be doing that on stage? It's not my forte, even though if I used that format I'm sure my popularity could expand just like fucking Henry fucking Rollins. I'm not interested in expanding that, if it's at the expense of the way I think my message needs to be related – housed within this female format, which is a fucking joke to me anyway as I sit here with my tits out. Whose trick is this? This is not how I feel I should look. It doesn't represent how my emotions really are. I'm my own puppet. It censors your every waking moment, and the imbalance of where your power lies because of the juxtaposition of the gender divide...I'm sitting here more male than you, housed in this. How do you deal with that? And you ask why I'm aggressive on stage! Maybe it's the fucking bitch coming out of me. You're looking at a psychological hermaphrodite."

(Pause)

"See! Now that's funny, right? You're laughing – because I allowed you the space to laugh. That's what a comedian is. I hate comedians. What is this group laughter?"

(Pause)

"My existence will not be validated by more sales, by more performances. I have already validated myself by continuing to do what I do in a way that history cannot ignore, period. All I ever wanted to do was shit in the face of history, to leave my own skid mark through history and now you can just go Google my fucking name and see how many times it appears as a footnote in everybody else's history...I don't need to do another fucking thing."

"My point was to document hysteria from a female perspective within one person's life, concerning the personal, the sexual and the political. I'm the most successful person I know. I don't need to sell any records to prove that."

BRIGHT EYES



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FEAR

The dystopian dreams of **Roots Manuva**

"Have I seen the devil?" Roots Manuva stops munching on his toast for a second and chuckles nervously. "I swear I have. It's stupid, it's when your brain's not triggering properly, and you've been out on the lash, hungover. I've been told if you take too many mushrooms you shouldn't look in the mirror because you look like the devil. I've never experienced it."

On the way over, I'd wondered what his would be like. I'd assumed: it'd be plush, clean, spacious. Like Lenny Kravitz's villa, with vintage gear worth more than my lifetime earnings.

Cos Manuva is bigger than Kravitz, isn't he? I mean, his last album sold 100,000. He got nominated for a couple of 'snobby awards' as he puts it on 'Babylon Medicine'. He won a bunch of accolades, played some shows, and took British rap into a new era by making good records, and selling them. Isn't that enough?

Well, pre-grime, it was. But Roots is an innovator, too. His music, a quarter-speed inversion of the rap/reggae hybrid grown 10 years earlier by pioneers such as The Demon Boyz and The London Posse, is restless and odd, occasionally ugly. But it's his attitude that's brought him fame. A cocky ripple of austerity and surrealism, he was the first British rapper to make the US sound irrelevant, for at least as long as the record was playing. Arguably the finest British rap record to date, and one of the most widely appreciated, 'Witness' was his 'Hey Ya'-style crossover smash. Maybe that's why I thought he'd be living the high life.

But I was mistaken. Roots' studio is in south London, not Bel Air. There's a couple of turntables, a mixer, a battered couch, and an assortment of magazines laid out on a coffee table. It's up two flights of stairs and feels like a basement. There's a heavy rock band practicing downstairs, a patient receptionist, and a sign on the door telling passers by that 'THIS IS NOT A SAUNA'. And it's not even his studio, just somewhere he's rented for two or three months.

"I've always been frustrated by the wide crossover potential of what I do." Mr Manuva looks uncomfortable as he contemplates the next few months of promotional chores tied to releasing his third album, *Awfully Deep*. "When I was on *Jools Holland* I just felt so weird. How can I get to those platforms making what I consider to be such awkward music?"

That's what appealed to me about the album, that it sounds so nakedly awkward...

"Good."

...and that's a true reflection of how people are. When music's too polished it seems false. So in a way, it's odd that the very thing that's making you successful...

"...makes me uncomfortable. It's weird. In the initial dream, the initial vision for Roots Manuva, I didn't take into account being in those arenas."

How far did you think you would get?

"My vision was to produce, to get notoriety as a sonic visionary. The hip hop guy who lived in a house on a hill in Buckinghamshire, with this really great sounding studio and an ear that made crazy obscure bands millions. Nobody knew him, but everybody knew him. I never imagined paying the rent off rapping on a record."

How do you take it when people say nice things about your music?

"I'm always surprised, I'm like, 'Damn! You really get it? You really got that? No way, I thought it was just me.'"

What about awards?

"That's pretty surprising as well. Not so much the MOBO awards, that was for the British section, the ghetto section."

"Choice FM don't give me daytime radio play. They're a community station but they don't back my music. So-called cool playlist people don't get into independent stuff. The Americans get daytime play, but they have a tiny section for the UK – five minutes of the day."

"It's not just them, though, it's sour grapes at everybody: it's the MOBO awards, MTV Base, Radio 1. People from British black culture, pirate stations and all that, get to a point within the mainstream machine and they forget where they came from, the whole ethos of backing the streets and independence. Suddenly it's just about paying your mortgage and getting your third home in Trinidad."

Do you feel that's changing at all?

"No, I think it's getting worse. Since Soul II Soul and Loose Ends no British black music has had the same impact on the world, because these bourgeois blacks who've been given some influence have turned their backs on the grass roots."

What about Channel U, 1Xtra? Do you feel they're different?

'These songs are exaggerated; they're super lies, super sins...'

Do some of the nominations feel tokenistic?

"At times. But I suppose that's my paranoia. The nicest one was the Mercury, I don't know why but it felt sincere. I thought I would win that as well. I thought, 'maybe it's my time this year. I'm gonna get that 20,000 quid and buy a Ford Coupe.'"

What kind of reaction are you expecting to this record?

"A mixed one. It's not a typical hip hop record. I'm bound to lose a lot of people."

Away from the onerous promotional slog, there's the honour of an almost spotless cool that even the MOBO and Mercury awards can't touch. Of course the awards mean nothing: if they did then his music would be fucked. Cos Roots Manuva walks the same taut wire as Dizzee, between paranoia and panto, so cool he's been mentioned by a talking toilet monster on *Dick And Dom In Da Bungalow*.

In 'Colossal Insight' what do you mean by "bourgeois blacks"?

"It's about elitism among economically mobile blacks. Like myself, actually. I feel at times they're not supportive of what I do."

In what way?

"Yeah, even them. They start off with the right attitude and the right ethos, but six months, 12 months on, they're toeing the line. You watch it at prime time and it might as well be *Top Of The Pops*."

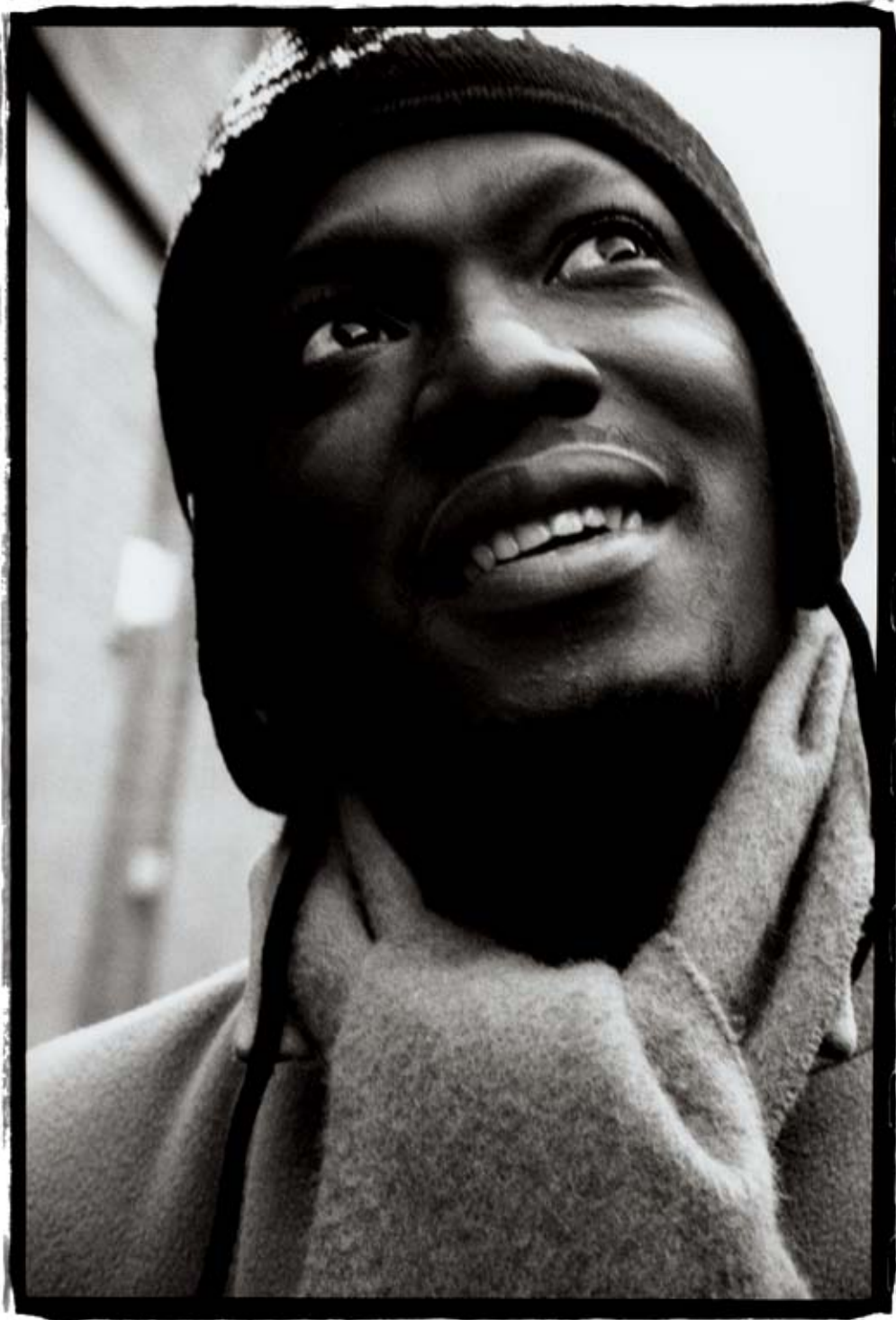
You must get some daytime airplay.

"Yeah. They probably think I'm an ungrateful bastard cos they do play me a bit. But it's not with the same enthusiasm. If there was a new 50 Cent record, it would be pumped and played all day long. I don't know if they mean to, but they belittle it. Isolate it. Do strange things."

"They're always looking to get endorsements from the Americans. If an English artist gets signed doing r'n'b or hip hop, they're sent to America to use some D-list American producer. They might even use an A-list American producer, but they don't get the same standard of product."

Who are you thinking about?

"I'm thinking about Big Brovaz. I'm thinking about Ms Dynamite. I was kind of upset they didn't stick with what Sticky was doing, it had more of an edge to it, a real British sound. No disrespect to Ms Dynamite, cos it's good quality stuff, but I dunno..."



'It's about relishing in fear, paranoia, the bizarre, and the unlikely absurd'

Awfully Deep. Say it again, but elongate the 'w' in an upwardly mobile UK English accent from before The Beatles, like "awwwwwwwfully deep, darling", a mixture of disdain, bleak realism, and sad celebration. Throughout its 14 (sometimes morbidly) introspective tunes, this record's saving grace is a humour so black it makes tar look luminous. As Roots understates it in 'Chin High', the record is infested by, "cryptic displays of deadpan": magnificent, dissonant sequences of squalls, mumbles, and gothic paranoia. It's either an oeuvre-defining masterpiece, or career suicide. Or both.

"I wanted to try and get a phrase that would explain itself," he protests of the title. If that's too oblique, he's distilled his preoccupations into a single verse on 'The Falling'. "Guns, bitches, hos, crack, death and disease and a baseball bat", he starts, before rambling through a nightmare vision of STDs and brain tumours. It's the most relentlessly gloomy black British album since Tricky obsessed over disintegrating families and prostitution on *Angels With Dirty Faces*. Still, it's hard to trust a thread when the specifics are so overblown. You'd rather dismiss it as panto: chastised, castrated, sterilised to protect...everyone.

Take the title track with its Numanesque shudder and synthesised bassoon sub-bassline straight out of a kids' TV theme tune. "Things are getting awfully deep," he complains on the chorus, "awfully deep, can't get no sleep." This isn't a Disneyfied take on depravity, it's a live action *Scooby Doo* directed by Pasolini. An insomniac ramble, with isolated stabs of lucid guilt over "A terrible phase of spending money with whores", it soon moves on. To a mental hospital staffed by "crooked doctors and kinky nurses", a sort of *Carry On Up The Ghetto* where a sexy nurse lusts after a crack-head heart-throb. The villains "poke your arse and measure your schlong", which prods Mr Manuva into panic: "Voodoo in the hills and I'm running from ghosties," he cries.

Have you ever been treated for mental illness?

"No. I've been to the doctor and said, 'I can't sleep.' And they said, 'Try these drugs,' but I never took them. I'm doubly paranoid about their attitude to people who are a bit stressed out. Fuckin' hell, you're just feeding me drugs, you're worse than the dealers on the frontline."

Do you think they should prescribe weed instead?

"I dunno about that. But the people who drive trains and buses...they're randomly drug tested. If they admit to having a puff now and again, they get sent to a horrible little place where they poke you in the arse and prod you in the head."

Is that where the lines in 'Awfully Deep' come from?

"That's about society's attitude to mad people. It's relishing in fear, paranoia, the bizarre, and the unlikely absurd."

I ask him about the whores.

"It's just being bizarre," he explains. "It's talking about taboo and trying to shock and say the most imaginative weird thing."

Is it literal?

"Hell, no," he replies. "I haven't got enough money for that."

What's the most awful thing you've done that you'd be prepared to admit to?

"I wouldn't be prepared to admit to it."

Something you feel guilty about.

He pauses and sighs, visibly deliberating over his confession. "If my cousin reads this he'll probably smack me on the head..."

"One summer holiday in Wales

I nicked five quid from my cousin. Totally premeditated. And I got away with it. I made it seem like I had saved the money. My mum and dad were telling all their friends, 'He's such a good boy, he's saved up.' Evil."

It's the small things that stay with you.

"A fiver? That's big money when you're seven, man!"

How personal are your songs?

"They're exaggerated, they're super lies, super sins..."

Nightmares?

"Nightmares, dreams, egocentric madness. The part of me that would like to be bad." He pauses again. "But I can't be evil," he claims, "Thou should not kill".

In your worst nightmares, do you feel as if you're evil?

"A bit. I swear I was born evil. I had to learn the joy of sharing. I enjoyed being wicked, the fun of being evil. Getting away with it, but feeling guilty."

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DEEP FREEZE

Bright Eyes custodian Conor Oberst discusses Narnia, nightmares and Nebraskan rock formations

So many dead elephants; it gives me the creeps. Thousands of herds of them, under Nebraska, more than are alive in Africa today.

They're buried between beardedogs, rhinos and turtles in the territory's exotic subterranean. Imagine! Blame it on the Ice Age.

And that's not all. Nebraska is remarkable for other reasons too. It possesses a giant underground ocean: the largest in the land.

And in 1980: amazing things.

Radical developments in irrigation see underground water levels deplete by 70% across America. The exception is Nebraska – its levels don't reduce a jot. Instead, it boasts the world's most constantly flowing rivers, and its prolific water recharges itself thanks to vigorous minerals in the sandy loam.

Later that year, and in the same region, Conor Oberst is born.

The story is in the soil.

Enter our prodigal subject, Oberst, wide-eyed scribe and custodian of Bright Eyes, on a phone line connecting Highland snow and London sun. He's recounting tales of Springsteen tours and having hits at Number One.

He's speaking about his new album. And, ever the prodigal bard, there are two of them, due for simultaneous release. His recent singles, 'Take It Easy' and 'Lua', were also released concurrently and, staggeringly, reached Numbers One and Two in the American singles chart. It's a feat that was last achieved by Puff Daddy, yet one that our Leporidaen hero genially dismisses: "It's a pretty abstract thing, you know? Charts..."

Oberst has engendered a verdant yield since his first recording, aged 13, on his father's dusty reel-to-reel: a generous, heterogeneous crop of lyrical, literate, and startling songcraft, which is embedded in geology, archaeology, and mythology.

From his alluring, frequently rural designates ('Down A Rabbit Hole', 'Lake Havasu' and 'Water') to the urban/rural dichotomy that flanks his forthcoming 'acoustic' and 'electronic' releases, Oberst's work is abundant with earthly allegory.

Are these conscious terrestrial references and allusions? Or does our protagonist believe that his hometown's colourful history, its collective memory, subconsciously informs his alluvial output?

"I'd really like to think so, yeah. I think it's cool to think of a physical space being able to retain all the things that pass through it, you know, the idea that there's an... I don't know, a..."

A resonance?

"Exactly. Exactly. Like a resonance," he resumes warmly, as we desert rawk tawk in favour of morphic fields. "The idea that all the energy stays around, I totally believe in that kind of stuff... I find it fascinating the way things are preserved in the soil and the water." He waxes further about Nebraska's primordial wonder. "There's some cool prehistoric shit going on, man."

Bright Eyes' rousing new material is set to maintain this organic ideology and, though his blazing star is wildly in ascendance, his attitude is resolutely down to earth. While he's recently completed a high profile US tour with REM, Neil Young, and Bruce Springsteen ("Definitely different – but only as weird as I let it be"), there are other tours to which he more eagerly alludes. "I did some little shows with Jim James (My Morning Jacket) and M Ward," he enthuses. "We just basically toured around, the three of us, and played each others' songs, and that was cool – like a hootenanny – and now I'm doing a few shows with Simon Joyner."

I remark that Joyner is scheduled to play in Glasgow the day after we speak.

"Oh, I know!" he enthuses. "He's playing that café, the one with a record store in it, right? That's a great place."

I telepathically page Monorail its latest endorsement, before Oberst says that he wishes he could join us in Scotland. He's kind and he's jovial, and so I believe him. I find it harder to believe that Oberst's oft-conveyed brooding conduct could be applied to the character I speak with now: a gentle boy with a laughing voice.

It's long been imputed that Oberst harbours demons – and many of his struggles are paraded as standard. But to cast him as a beleaguered, awkward urchin

is wide of the mark. That said, his monsters rear their heads momentarily, as our chatter of daydreams descends into nightmares.

"I've been dreaming a lot, recently," he murmurs, quietening. "A lot of it really not so good, you know?" And I feel bad for raising the subject.

'There's some cool prehistoric shit going on there, man'

We alleviate the gloom by exchanging 'mare ejection tactics. I get out of my bad dreams, I tell him, by repeatedly squeezing my eyes tight shut. Conor concurs.

"Yeah, I definitely do that too, like, a lot of times when I'm having a nightmare, you can sort of tell yourself you've gotta move your arm or whatever to get out of it."

We laugh; we sound daft. He brightens; smiles himself out of the shadows, and we revert to the reverie.

"When I was young, I was a biiiig daydreamer..." he marvels.

These childhood vagaries, it transpires, elicited Oberst's ingenuity prior to sowing his muse in music.

"I could entertain myself forever, always making up things in my head," he recalls, noting that he manipulated these epics, re-ran them and paused them as one might a film or a record. "I'd have whole, very intense, in-depth daydreams... like, I could even stop them and start them again, whenever I wanted."

Over time, as with nature's self-organisation (in which elephants become herds, and herds become dust), Oberst's charged ideas, aged 13, aligned themselves, finally, into song.

What else beguiled him as a child, other than the pervasive knowledge that bearcats and oceans lay beneath his feet?

"My dad, when we were young, he would read to us," he remembers. "You know, *Dr Doolittle*, all the Narnia books – like fantasy stuff. I was waaaay into that..."



double vision

Words: **Nicola Meighan**

Illustration: **Robert Ramsden**

Bright Eyes

**I'm Wide Awake It's Morning/
Digital Ash In A Digital Urn (Saddle Creek)**

Come kneel beside me, and see this. The ground is mud, and it's blustery on the hill, but you can share my ragged anorak – here – there's room for both of us.

See it? Wedged in the frosty burrow there, under the shivering heather? It's a black metal shard, poking out of the rabbit hole, with sparkles like stars in the darkest sky. A precious Neolithic tool, it emerges: just lying there, revealed by nature and worms. All the archaeologists, all the experts in the world, couldn't expect to unearth such a wonder.

Sometimes the treasure you ceaselessly seek is staring you right in the face.

Now look at these: these two records in my freezing hands. One is *I'm Wide Awake It's Morning* and one is *Digital Ash In A Digital Urn* and both are by Bright Eyes, and together they're the tool in the hole on the hill: a shimmering, shadowy, startling find.

Here, come in – come over beside me – in the snug now, by the fire. I'll play you this record, it's *I'm Wide Awake It's Morning*: warm as the summer, dense as peat, gentle as the orange flames. It flickers and glows with upbeat hoedowns, downtime porch-songs, savage folk and cowboy serenades.

Listen to this, the gorgeous 'Old Soul Song', wherein our songbird Conor Oberst repeatedly, devastatingly mourns, "*And they went wild*" – as if, in fact, 'they' had done no such thing; had ignored him *en masse* and stayed home instead. And warm

to 'We Are Nowhere And It's Now' – an exquisite, wintry waltz, uplifted on the wings of Emmylou Harris. Its balmy "*Yellow bird*" refrain proffers one of Bright Eyes' most sanguine, if bittersweet, metaphors; one whose fluttering imagery is poignantly reprised in the swelling, penultimate lullaby, 'Poison Oak' – a glorious, barren salutation to hope.

My hands feel warmer now, yours too: let's dance. Let's wrestle off our sodden socks; toast them on the stony hearth; pirouette and whirl barefoot on the burnished, warm oak floor: to *Digital Ash In A Digital Urn*; to skewed, dark, tender electronic folk-pop that throbs and unwinds like a heart-sprung coil.

We'll shimmy to the spangling pop crunch of 'Hit The Switch'; grind to the deep-Depeche gravel of 'Down A Rabbit Hole'. And we'll spiral forever – our arms outstretched; our senses spinning – to the epic,

**Sometimes the treasure you
ceaselessly seek is staring you right
in the face**

cosmic reverence of 'I Believe In Symmetry' as it blazes like a comet, swoops like a phoenix, soars on an interstellar camber of strings. "*There's happiness in death*," rejoices Oberst, his spiritual verity fiercely euphoric.

We'll dance again and we'll dance all night, basking in the amber light: for the treasure in the burrow and the words in our ears and the warmth in our hearts and the songs in our hands.

He trails off, provoking a glimpse of Nebraska as Narnia: the empty, eternal winter plains of its Ice Age; the subsequent evolution of a magical quarter, bursting with life and unnatural energy, fed by a soil enriched by its past.

Yet if nature and children's literature go some way to probing Conor's consciousness, the riddle remains: how to define a man who is about to release an electronic pop oeuvre and a country-tinged folk jewel on the same day? Who spawns the lyrics, "*If you don't/I'll start drinking like the way I drank before/And I just won't have a future anymore*", and who marries them with a jangling, euphoric melody?

There's this quiz on the Internet, I tell him, that determines which Bright Eyes song you epitomise. I am, I report, 'Bowl of Oranges' and that's just fine by me, because the ostensibly carefree, chipper ditty belies a bleak but optimistic underbelly. And because my favourite colour is orange.

Oberst isn't aware that said quiz exists, and I cannot hence contain myself. I don my gingerest Cilla Black impression and fire away: is there a Bright Eyes song he'd most like to embody?

He laughs. "That's hard 'cause I'm all of those songs! But, you know, if I had to say one... then I guess 'The Big Picture'," he ventures after lengthy reflection, referring to the roving opener from his 2002 album *Lifted*, or *The Story Is In The Soil, Keep Your Ear To The Ground*.

The song upholds his earthy existentialism ("*Animal or angel/You were carved in bone/But your heart is just sand*"), but it is, perhaps more tellingly, a treatise on hope, of trying to make sense of a nonsensical world. "*There is nothing I know/Except a lifetime's one moment/And wishing will just leave you empty*," he reflects, unearthing a philosophical verity that's rooted in optimism, however concealed the latter may be.

It's apt today. Oberst is chipper: about his two new albums, his live shows, his friends, his growing confidence in his voice, in his art. And as we bid farewell, there's a final line from 'The Big Picture', Bright Eyes' self-professed archetypal psalm, which resonates: "*You can try to live in darkness/But you will never shake the light.*"

He laughs again.

I hang up. *Lifted*.

OXYGEN

I wanna be better than So you can breathe when you're drown-
 ing and weak in the knees I wanna speak louder than Ritalin For all the children who
 think that they've got a disease I wanna be cooler than t.v. For all the kids that
 are wondering what they are going to be We can be stronger than bombs If you're
 singing along and you know that you really believe We can be richer than industry As
 long as we know that there's things that we don't really need We can speak louder than
 ignorance Cause we speak in silence every time our eyes meet. On and on, and on, and
 on it goes The world it just keeps spinning Until I'm dizzy, time to breathe So close
 my eyes and start again anew. I wanna see through all the lies of society To the real-
 ity, happiness is at stake I wanna hold up my head with dignity Proud of a life where
 to give means more than to take I want to live beyond the modern mentality Where paper
 is all that you're really taught to create Do you remember the forgotten America?
 Justice, equality, freedom to every race? Just need to get past all the lies and
 hypocrisy Make up and hair to the truth behind every face Then look around to all the
 people you see, How many of them are happy and free? I know it sounds like a dream But
 it's the only thing that can get me to sleep at night I know it's hard to believe But
 it's easy to see that something here isn't right I know the future looks dark But it's
 there that the kids of today must carry the light.

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the void



the dresden dolls

Words: **Kieron Gillen**
Photography: **Anthony Wallace**

'In a song we're allowed to overstep the boundaries'

'Girl Anachronism' starts with a tease, a pantomime child waking up, stretching, slinking across the house in pyjamas, before – as the band combusts – falling down the stairs in a tangled jumble of limbs, piano wire and neuroses. Amanda (demented keyboards/playful histrionics) bounces along the piano line with a stiletto stab of a voice, hammering the blade into your forehead to permanently attach one of a grand array of black gags scrawled on torn notepaper. Brian (demented drums/playful stoicism) dances around Amanda's warped keys, alternating between spider-shuffle and Dada-drive. This song stands on a soapbox and lobs hand grenades. It does a stand-up routine that punches you as the punchline. It wanders into a Depressives Anonymous meeting and accuses them of being a bunch of dirty quitters. And then it's gone, with a dissonant chord and the resounding ring of some impressionable's life being changed forever.

Nothing else The Dresden Dolls do sounds even vaguely like it.

They've been doing what they describe as "Brechtian Punk Cabaret" since forming in Boston in 2000. While their description's not wrong, they're nonetheless a band who provoke a desperate scramble for references. In the interplay between the pair and their taste for melodrama, you could posit a half-transgendered Weimar Sparks. Or a White Stripes with musical loves 30 years too early with the sex roles swapped around.

They're one of *those* bands. The Dresden Dolls are a holistic experience to be lived inside, the sort who make you want a satchel on which to hurriedly scrawl their names. It's clearly deliberate. Look at them. How could it not be?

"Some of the most profound moments of the last year or two of my life have been getting emails from 16- or 17-year-old – well – girls, particularly, saying that 'My life has been really, really difficult and your CD has not left the player, and been the soundtrack and saviour of this tough time I've been going through'," Amanda says. "And we both know how that feels, because we're both the kind of kids who found solace and refuge in music."

I think of a lineage of *those* bands, stretching down the years, inspiring and being inspired in turn.

But the word to which I return with the Dresdens is the loaded word 'theatrical'. The songs, the broken-doll image, the love of switching between tragedy and comedy at the slightest provocation or doing both at once, the way they act on the stage, the way they *act*. It comes across best in the pair's performance, each other's perfect foils or – as Amanda puts it – "partners in crime". "There's a lot of comic interplay between the two of us," Brian claims. "It's not as if everything is dark and dramatic – it fluctuates between very funny and back. That's the beauty of the show, and the essence of the band. That duality of everything surrounding life and what it's made up of."

On record, this is best captured by second single 'Coin-operated Boy', which opens as a playful, cabaret romp about a woman rejecting real men for a sexy, submissive, safe, supportive clockwork toy. And then the gaudy plaything shatters as, from nowhere, comes the sweeping dream of a bridge, stepping outside the song to note how immensely, impossibly sad this situation is. It crescendos into the possibility of a new life with needs and wants, before collapsing into the original playground rhyme. Except that now the joke's just not funny anymore ("Coin-operated boy with his pretty coin-operated voice, saying that he loves me, that he's thinking of me ...").

Putting aside the heartache, Amanda has a way with a verbal barb that's simply spiteful. Even better, it's unapologetically and gloriously so. "The beauty of being a songwriter is that you're allowed to take these dramatic liberties that you have to keep in check on a day-to-day basis because of the social contract," she says. "Everyone feels those over the top, overblown impulses inside, but we keep them in check, because we love each other. And in a song, they're allowed to overstep the boundaries. That's one of the most beautiful things about music, and it's why people gravitate towards music that says something, does something, goes somewhere we're often not allowed to go."

www.dresdendolls.com



dj mentat

Words: **Richard Stacey**

Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

Skinnyman's terrified. You can hear it in his voice on the last DJ Mentat record, 'When I Give My Heart To You'. He's screaming about the brink of insanity, about being eaten alive by a madman's mentality.

All because of the beat.

"The beat started banging in my head as if the rhythm was attacking me," he starts. Then, breaking down completely, he begs Mentat for mercy, "Mentat! It's having me!" he cries.

wasn't enough, then the album he's working on will decimate the doubters. Featuring, amongst others, Karl Hinds, Lethal, Destruction, MCD, Shameless, Foreign Beggars, Skeme, Scor-Say-Zee, Cappo, Apocraphe, Klashnekoff, Terra Firma, Kyza, Dirty Diggers and Mystro, it looks like being the best guide to new UK rap since Skitz's *Countryman* LP back in 2001.

This is just the start. "Twenty tracks on the album does not cover one-fifth of the talent that's around," claims Mentat, and he's right. The new scene sees styles ranging from grimy to bashy to moody to oldschool hippety hop coalescing

'The kids don't want to hear what 50 Cent's saying about his 50-inch rims'

Oh, the beat. Like a younger, less smug Kanye fusing his helium voices with the digitised crunch of, say, Fusion, it's the kind of effortless, wise experimental music that certain independent American crews could learn a lot from. Because it's happy. It celebrates life. And it's got tunes.

There aren't many records that make being eaten alive sound so vital. That 'When I Give My Heart To You' is one of them is down to the virtually unknown Force FM DJ and record producer Mentat, a crafter of carnivorous beats and a well connected man of taste. If a debut single, 'Rugged Wid It' featuring Seannie T and Roots Manuva,

around a defiantly new school patriotism.

As a radio DJ, it's something Mentat hears every week. "The kids don't want to hear what 50 Cent's saying about his bling and his 50-inch rims. They're shouting out Dizzee Rascal, Kano, Skinnyman, Karl Hinds."

This enthusiasm is backed up by the pragmatic DIY attitude of labels such as Lowlife, Kemet, Zebra Traffic and Mentat's own Beat Asylum. "That's why the British scene, to me, is the best scene. Skinnyman, he's truly passionate. But he's also thought, 'Sod it, there's no industry backing this, I'll do it myself.' That's what makes this scene so right."



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music is my boyfriend

Words: **Fiona Fletcher**
Illustration: **Søren Mosdal**



One night, a boy band saved my life. A journalist friend invited me to see Busted at Wembley Arena: "I need a musician's perspective, to tell if they really play their own instruments."

I liked Busted: horny teenage boys who sing about shagging their 30-something teacher. The whole post-ironic package – a punk band assembled like a boy band (or is it the other way around?) – appealed to me. They thought they were punk, but they were much closer to the Sixties bubblegum that influenced the Ramones.

At Wembley, I wanted to be cynical. But halfway through the set, as the pretty little blonde one grinned and waved at us, something overcame me. Maybe it was the

sentiments and bubbling pop melodies, and Charlie (whose recent departure prompted the band's demise), with the eyebrows and muso solos and deliberately obscure indie affectations, I saw the fundamental tension of my own personality.

My friends laughed, dismissing it as a midlife crisis: soon I'll be hanging around schoolyards whistling at teenage boys. But it's more than nostalgia – it's the jubilant, exuberant kitchen sink dramas where all problems are solved in three minutes and 20 seconds. Busted's big, witty hits, and the aching ballads of longing for love and acceptance. 'Loser Kid' and 'Loner In Love' and *"Just because I'm nerdy and all my friends are 30..."* Go ahead, take the piss. They were a boy band.

"Where are the female music journalists?" Miss AMP once asked me. "Do girls not have the guts?" Neither of us understood, because we've always had ambition, and the belief that we have something

to say. But when people mock Busted, it becomes clear to me. My first musical love was Duran Duran; they made me the person I am today. Their lyrical and stylistic allusions led me to Burroughs, Bowie, Warhol, The Velvet Underground and other obsessions. I adored the exotic, phased-out texture of the synths and the sinuous funk of the basslines entwined round each other, slashed ragged by guitar – it's still what I crave in music. But Duran Duran were not cool. Girls liked them, they were a teenybop band, a haircut band. Like Saint Peter denying his faith, I denied my love. I taped over their albums, sopreciously obtained with pocket money, with obscure college radio indie rock. A decade later, a friend played me 'Planet Earth' and 'Hungry Like The Wolf'. Drunk, dancing round

our handbags, I wept for my lost innocence and lost faith, ashamed of how I'd caved in to the pressure, not from my peers, but from pretentious boys.

Women are taught to be ashamed of the things they love about music. Boys want to categorise, to collect, to use music as a passport to a world of cool. Girls fall in love with music, it describes their emotions, lives, worlds. Boys care about record labels and genres, and memorise discographies. Girls memorise personal details about musicians, know their favourite colour, read their favourite novels. Obsessive boy fans know the name of the drummer who played on one song. Obsessive girl fans know the name of the girlfriend who inspired it.

Boys write fanzines, and the music press, thus owning music. Girls write fan fiction, projecting themselves into the world of that music. One approach is enshrined as an art form, as Proper Music Journalism. But any attempt to describe the emotion that music triggers in you is dismissed. The inherent power of music is its sexuality, its emotion. Writing about that sexuality is denigrated.

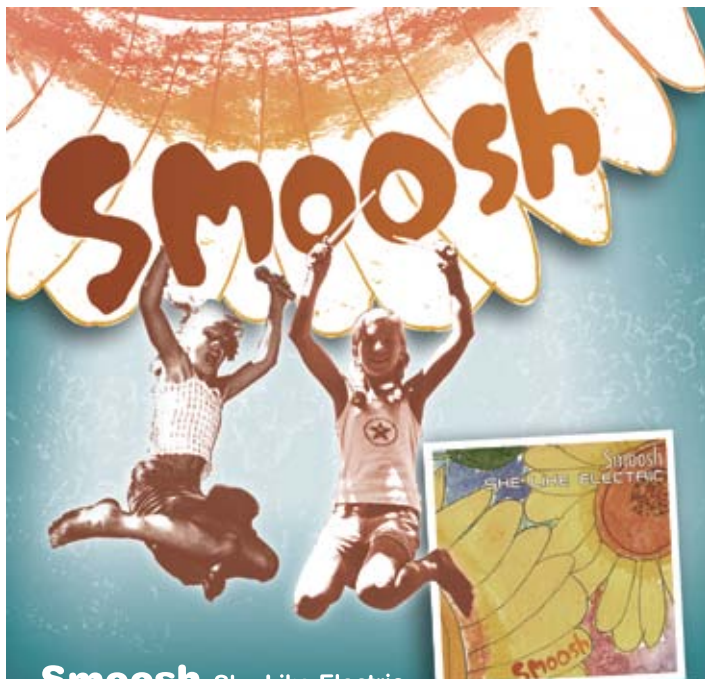
It's men that don't get it. The little girls understand. Pop music is about love. If you're going to sing pop, you'd better be lovely. Rock music is sex, so it'd damn well better be sexy. It's not missing the point to be sexually obsessed with music. To realise the way music moves your hips and your heart, that is the point.

Music lets me glimpse perfection for three minutes. It's my community, my church, my comfort. Loving a band brings me together with other fans, even as we're squabbling over which member would be whose boyfriend. And music gives me an ambition for the future; it gives me my dreams and my fantasies back.

Music is my boyfriend now.

Women are taught to be ashamed of the things they love about music

age-defying effects of the oestrogen simmering off the crowd, or the adrenaline rush of the most deafening sound on earth, the simultaneous shrieks of several thousand teenage girls, but I had something approaching a religious experience. Dropping our notepads, forgetting our Proper Rock Journalist stance, we were on our feet, dancing, playing air guitar, screaming our heads off. For 90 minutes, I was 13 again, no soul-crushing day job, no rent to pay, no crumbling marriage. When I was 13, escape meant running away to the city, being "fabulous, flirty and thirty". Now I'm 33, escape means finding that teenage girl still trapped inside, dancing with wild abandon. That's why I go to gigs. To remember who I am. In the tension between James, with his overblown romantic



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I-r: Adele Bethel, Ailidh Lennon, David Gow, Scott Paterson



sons and daughters

Words: **Stewart Gardiner**
Photography: **Mark Connelly**

Adele Bethel has cornered me. She has something to say that she wants me to tell you: Sons And Daughters are a feminist band.

It's a lofty message, and one I put to the guys in the group. Scott Paterson (who shares voice/guitar duties with Adele) and David Gow (drums) start off in agreement, before withdrawing from anything too conclusive.

"Well, I mean, Adele's the lyricist," says Scott. David says, "the band's really a fifty/fifty split."

"Can I make a word up? I'd say we're more *equalists*." Drawing out the shaky neologism, Scott gives out an embarrassed cry for help. "If you put that in, can you just make sure that I laugh after it? Just so I don't look like a complete dick."

Not to worry: Sons And Daughters would be hard pushed to appear even a little short of beautifully chiselled, natural cool. Along with bassist and mandolin player Ailidh Lennon, they are clearly

the group most likely to in 2005. Passed an early copy of debut mini-album *Love The Cup* in October 2003, I was infatuated to the extent that I couldn't possibly imagine a band I loved this much becoming as big as they soon will be. And that's no reflection

'It was a real kind of knee-trembler, you know?'

on them; I'm merely pointing to my taste as not normally setting the masses a-whooping.

An ace forthcoming single recorded with Edwyn Collins, 'Dance Me In', punches their country blues punk howl even deeper into lopsided pop glory, its handclaps further revealing the band's accessibility while simultaneously distancing them from surface sheen. As if that didn't spell out enough potential for you, their first full-length proper (expected May) will have Victor Van Nugt at the controls. A man whose start in music was doing live sound for the

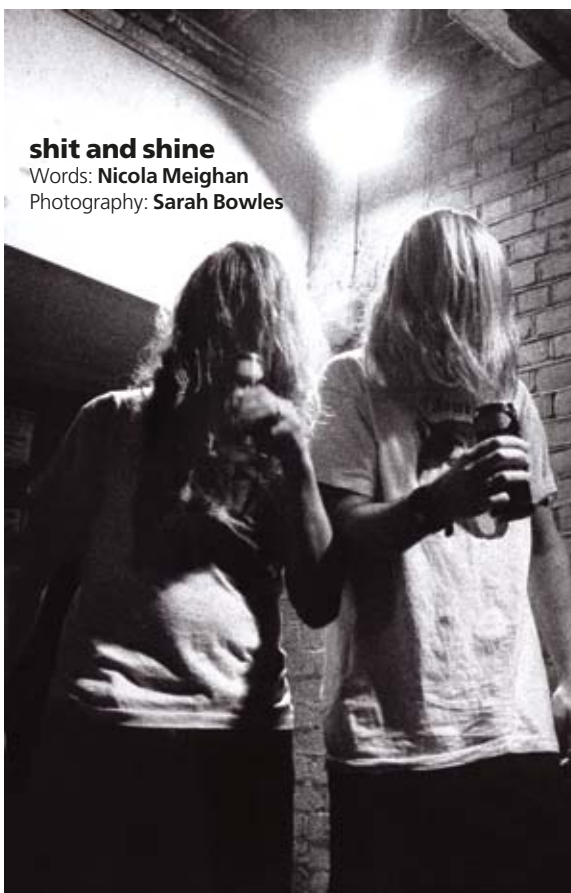
Birthday Party, he seems the perfect choice to forego all thoughts of reining in, and get down to the bloody task in hand. For Sons And Daughters are a band fuelled by need and love, and the human impulse to give in to need and to question love. Sons And Daughters are a pop band, after all.

"We're not pretentious people," concurs Scott hopefully. "We don't do anything for high art's sake, or anything like that. We're not snobs."

As a result of who they are and what they have become, a late 2004 support slot for the Delgados at Glasgow Barrowlands was so much more than just another show on another tour. That it was a triumphant homecoming lent it even more significance. That the after-effects ran riot through heart, soul and bodily functions spoke volumes.

"It was a real kind of knee-trembler, you know?" ponders Scott, unsure of his own words. But it's those words that best capture the experience of this band: from the outside looking in, Sons And Daughters, are themselves, a real kind of knee-trembler.

www.sonsanddaughtersloveyou.com



shit and shine

Words: **Nicola Meighan**
Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

"We're like a donkey and a beagle on a see-saw."

"We're the second-prettiest flower at the flower show."

"A blinking shiny-faced one-eyed puppet, head slowly turning."

Turn to us and turn it up, Shit And Shine. Where have you been all my life?

France and Texas, it transpires – making bowel-ripped, sphincter-fucked brilliant music, and revelling rampantly out on the piste: "We met in a red cable car in Klosters on the way to a downhill slalom competition," purrs map-reading, rambling fanatic C Clouse, who – alongside Frank Mcayhan (a keen amateur swimmer) – steers the confounding Shit And Shine. The deafening duo's instrumental credentials include guitar, bass, vocals and, (of course), lawnmower. They employ, like, 20 guest drummers. Simultaneously.

"We played in an abandoned hospital in Belgium," they reminisce. "We each arranged 50 pints of Stella on a trestle table in front of us. Then we ejected the contents of each glass forcibly into each other's faces, discharging the empty vessels into an industrial wood chipper. Chunks of glass sprayed, shattering on white tiled walls. In front of us we had eight drummers, pounding away."

Stumble upon their hand-scrawled vinyl-only debut 'You're Lucky To Have Friends Like Us' and impale yourself on this: wolverines shrieking and blistering kraut-beats; Tyrolean reed-shanties; car-chase metal, and dirty-bomb, Juggernaut, jack-knife electro.

From the bongo-punk flamenco of 'Life Like A Life' to the baritone Jane Birkin/Quo fusion,

'Recommencons', theirs is the sound of fucking madness at large.

Church bells peal and engines fire and drills crash like terrorists' planes, while acoustic trills timidly pussyfoot among woozy-pitched pianos and Buck Rogers fanfares and Nordic Death Metal and ray-gun guitar riffs. Dear God.

A sonic maelstrom battered by pop sensibilities ("We like Kim Wilde. But Gloria Estefan reminds us of a Chinese man's face sticking out of a turkey's ass"), their 'avantgrindcorepost/prepunkeuropop' tag is proving to be something of a bind: for there are several genres yet to be rumbled by our Texan/French protagonists.

"We are spending a great amount of time and effort learning dual ragtime piano," they forebode, as Scott Joplin burls like a dervish in his grave. "We have two uprights set up in our studio. It's been going well."

Should we expect further outrage with the imminent release of their new material?

"Yes – our vinyl debut is being re-released on CD, and we've got a new album coming out soon."

What to anticipate from the new stuff then?

"Expect the impossible flavours of spring: Lions' Tongues and Mares' Tails, Hondas in the heat." We should expect nothing less.

And what of the aforementioned Klosters slalom? Did Shit And Shine sacrifice their shot at sporting glory and make music instead? Oh no. "We tied for first place," they casually conclude. "We are good at everything."

Believe it, and (ears) weep.

www.riotseason.com

'The next album's gonna be body-black-metal-fusion-funk'

the knife

Words: **kicking_k**

Illustration: **Andrew Clare**



The Knife = brother/sister in pastel hoodies, painted monkey faces and domino masks. See also: surrealist mini-movie *When I Found The Knife* (25MB) – “I wanted to cry and I wanted to laugh at the same time... It was machines and emotions... This was what I had been waiting for.” Album: *Deep Cuts*. Banks of synths, alien vox, the saddest bells of the carnival, “like seeing an ice sculpture melt” (© me, 2004). Not raw emotion, the stuttering, broken noise of, say, punk, where the inability to articulate was precisely what was being expressed, but a feeling cultured in a lab, behind glacial tones like bullet-proof glass.

The Knife = ‘Heartbeats’. In the midst of an Eighties-pastiche feeding frenzy, this was not the low-tech high-irony of *Electroclash Proper*, cartoon obscenity and porny vérité, unromantic shock

tactics. No, she was singing, “We were in love.” She was “Sharing different heartbeats in one night.” Think *Xenomania* – cloning the scenic beauty of new wave and filtering it through a decade of dance music and r’n’b. Clean, epic pop: difficult to dislike, easy to pick up, sticks in your head.

The Knife = ‘Pass It On’ video. Transvestite karaoke artiste to a room full of squares, aching with melancholic lust, covertly serenading a spot of rough trade: “I’m in love with your brother,” he groans, “what’s-his-name...” And, back in the real world, Swedish Grammys 2003: The Knife win an award, snub the applause, hire some Guerrilla Girl-style gorillas to collect it on their behalf (“We don’t think it made any difference; we still haven’t got any female A&Rs in Sweden. We’ll have to figure something better out next time.”) Not that they

expect to win any more prizes: “The next album’s gonna be body-black-metal-fusion-funk,” they say, “so we don’t think so.”

The Knife = gold disc certified, 30,000 and counting. “Surprisingly, we sold a lot of records in Sweden and got a lot of radio play. We don’t know much about our audience, but we think it’s very mixed. Sometimes the media get scared because it seems it’s not enough to just feel it, they have to understand. When they don’t, they write that it’s good anyway.”

The Knife = the correct ratio of surface to depth; enough ridiculousness to give me license to feel, without thinking I’m doing something so uncool as connecting to another human. I don’t know how they do it. But they do it, all the same.

www.theknife.net





magic loves the hungry

Words: **Neil Kulkarni**
Illustration: **Andrew Clare**

I've a feeling she's not listening anymore.

Every night I'd pray to my little goddess. She sits on a tiger, the cosmos spinning around her 50-odd fingers, a beguiling smile playing across her lips, knowing that hope and faith are not maintainable as permanent conditions. She knows that they should take you over like love, a last resort when the will and its inevitable futility have been exhausted.

Every night I'd throw the day at her and every morning I'd ask her to throw it back at me. And for a while things went my way. Then I forgot my little goddess. She became another religious artefact on my mantel, alongside the two Ganeshes; the Jain figurehead, proudly secular (that's the benefit of being a Hindu – you don't have to believe in God); the wallet-sized laminate of the Virgin and Child plucked from a Chicago sidewalk. Like every other object around me, the goddess just became another distant

taker up of space within my planet-sized demise. I let things slip and 2004 became perhaps the shittiest year of my life, not only in events – my job, lovelife, and car all died – but also my response to them, a plain, expansive, debilitating depression that made every moment of hope seem cruel, every spark of effort snuffed out by inexpressible anger and the bone-chilling damp of self-loathing.

Of course, if I'd made my daily orisons to the sacred mantelpiece, nothing would have been different. It's just that today is Christmas day, I can see the end of the year looming and, startlingly, I feel hope. I have new holy artefacts that are spiritually re-arming me right now, telling me the only viable response to this bleak, miasmic fog is to thrash out with beauty, with anger, with hope. And I want to talk about these sacred tablets, these pop records. Cos together, they're a new prayer for my little goddess.

Hip hop holds my brain in a state of FUCK YOU. It tells me, yeah, you can't imagine a worse fate than the future, but you wanna be there when the shit goes down having FUN. **Lil Jon & the East Side Boyz**' 'What U Gon Do' (TVT) makes you feel like Robocop going from chassis to completion, clamped with only forward vision while the spods in your peripheries are retooling you for war. **Edan**'s 'Fumbling Over Words That Rhyme' (Lewis) continues his mindblowing mission to marry psych and rap with his finest since 'Primitive Plus'. On the flip, 'Beauty' is putting a spring in my step that sproings me stellar, an overt attempt at 'hip hop surrealism' that manages simultaneously to sound like both Ultramagnetics and also United States Of America's 'Love Song For The Dead Ché'. On a similarly maverick tip, **J-Zone**'s hysterical 'Greater Later' (Old Maid), **Sage Francis**' 'Sea Lion' (feat. **Will Oldham**) (Epitaph), **Cee-Rock**'s 'Anderson Iz Nice' (Wolftown),

Example's 'The Sell Out' (All The Chats), and **Count Bass D's** 'DownEasy' (Ramp) are all infernally, inspirationally full of incisive insight, insane abstraction, hilarity and sheer bloody joyful LIFE.

My new year's resolution is to give this music the exposure it fucking deserves, cos in a world where hip hop's still thought of in terms of yer Eminems and Ja Rules these people need to be made stars as quickly as possible. Hip hop is still a faith to get irate and agitated about, and people working within it are still not getting their due. Just dig the fact that **Roots Manuva's** 'Colossal Insight' (Big Dada) will be analysed everywhere as a UK rap tune, and not for what it is – one of the finest British pop records of this decade. He's been listening to Cabaret Voltaire, The Cure and the second side of *More Specials*, bigstyle. 'Colossal Insight' pivots on a poignant downward spiral of Doppler-effect electro spliced against a snappy lounge-ska beat. The lyrics are hilarious when they're not winceworthily accurate; a dead funny, deadly serious, deadpan, dead-on look at Roots' journey of the past few years and where he imagines he's going. He's sensible enough to end up with the colossal insight that predictions are pointless when you, the world and your music are this uncontrollable. **The Soft Pink Truth** remix is brutally irreverent to its source—Roots' vocal shredded down, everything surrendered to the disco-pulse. You'd better take a deep breath and keep following the R in 2005.

Pop holds my heart together and strokes the breakages with tender, glue-exuding fingers. I don't mean **Manic Street Preachers'** appositely titled 'Empty Souls' (Sony), **Kasabian's** storm-in-a-shitbucket 'Cut Off' (BMG), **Interpol's** inappropriately titled 'Evil' (Matador), **Client's** 'Pornography' (Toast Hawaii but basically EMI), **The Killers'** dismal 'Somebody Told Me' (Pinnacle), **The Others'** shockingly mediocre 'Lackey' (Universal) or the **Chemical Brothers'** menopausal 'Galvanise' (Virgin). These are the records that the megastores and mags and PR-dependent broadcasters want you to think matter in January '05. Oh sure, they 'matter' in a depressingly real sense (all the above will get in your way at some point soon), but not to those smart enough to know we're too dumb to be pleased by such middling thought, too bright to be suckered by such tepid ghosts of fire.

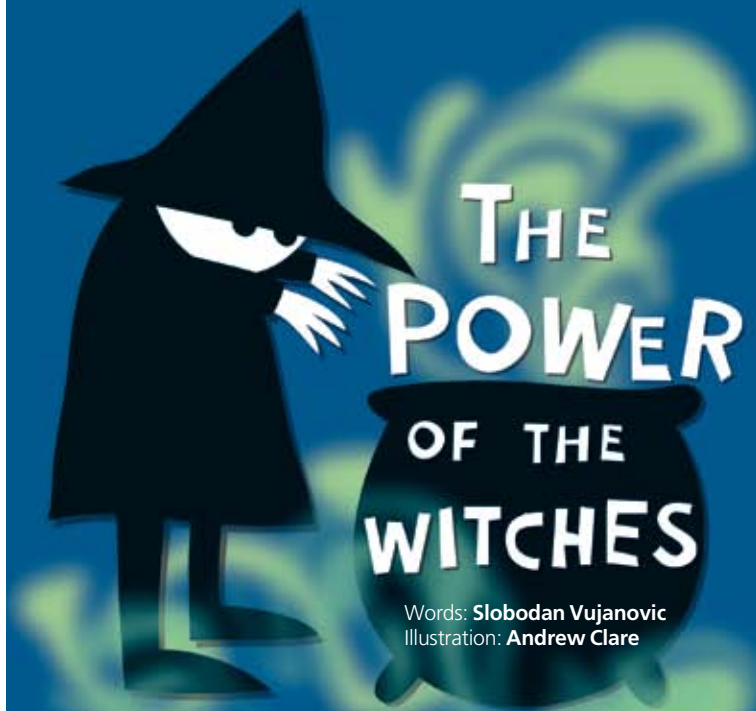
We're too bright to be suckered by such tepid ghosts of fire

Nah, dig **Soulwax's** 'E-Talking' (PIAS) for its honesty and humour, **65daysofstatic's** wonderfuel 'Retreat!Retreat' (Monotreme), which is like Mogwai with all the hmmmmpffftttt taken out and all the WOW!JESUS!!HOLYFUCKINGMOTHEROFPEARL!!! put back in, and **The Silent League's** 'Breathe' (Something In Construction), cos it's like all the best bits of the Joyzipper and Fiver albums condensed into three wondrous minutes. Most of all, dig **Hood's** 'The Lost You' (Domino). Why? Let's go for a walk. Yeah, I know it's midnight. And it's Christmas day. But I've got to tell you something. Put your gloves on.

OK, we're here, this is the highest you get. Now, turn around and look at the horizon. See the lights twinkling into the distance? You can see the runway to the airport and the rolling hills to the south. The dim orange glow of other cities to the North. Now close your eyes and hear the traffic die to no louder than your heartbeat. Feel the wind gash your face open, let your lips rest on each other, breathe in the far-off din of other souls in transit and realise your fragile place in the universe. Look at the curvature of the earth from this blood-spilled Petri dish that is your hometown, realise how broken down you are, get ripped open by the elements, find that small, steady voice of disquiet that is your own, inside your temple. All that despair, all that heartache, all those reasons to leave – why have you remained? Why are you, impossibly, seeing another year begin? Because, like it or not, in-between the stars and the sodden earth, you are what you always were and will always be – a mind, heart and soul open to the universe, hungry for death but ever so prone to rebirth. You are the city and the city is you. There is hope here, and it's not empty-headed, it's a full-on throwing out and ingestion of love. It's gonna be a battle and it's gonna be a struggle, but what else is there? Yes, we are outnumbered hugely. But that should tell us everything.

Hood are up on that hillside already. They've found 'The Lost You' and turned it into the most soulful, spectral, suggestive music of 2005 thus far. They'll carry you home. And then, there's much to be done. These artefacts, these bits of plastic – they're chances, d'ya see? New ways of seeing and being. Pop won't let you die. Let's go home. Let's stick... *apart*. Let's ask that little goddess if she fancies a dance.

I've a feeling she will.



The Vichy Government: Make Love To The Camera (Angular)

Angular is the bitchiest pop label around

Woodbine: The Woods (Domino)

Like squirrels biting at the hard to reach the soft

The Butchers: You Betcha (Voodoo Rhythm)

Brazilian garage: almost good as Swiss

Electric Company: Theme From The Mushroom Shaped Tongue (Tigerbeat6)

The only Kid606 record that good parents need to buy for their kids

War Against Sleep: Borderline Personality (Fire)

More cheery than Messages – or we didn't get the message

Explosions In The Sky: Your Hand In Mine (Bella Union)

The mellowest place from *Friday Night Light's* soundtrack

Head Of Femur: Yeoman Or Tinker (Greyday)

Student music for students who don't spent much time studying

Shelley's Children: Jack (Damaged Goods)

When I played this, I said, "This is something I'm sure John Peel would have liked"

Their time will come before the Armageddon

3 Inches Of Blood: Wykydron (Roadrunner)

Iron Maiden for generations too cool to appreciate the originals

Fabienne Delsol: Laisse Tomber Les Filles (Damaged Goods)

Belle And Sebastian And Brigitte And Bardot

Antony & The Johnsons – You Are My Sister (Secretly Canadian)

The only white Jimmy Scott there'll ever be

Clinic: The Scythe (Domino)

Their time will come before the Armageddon. I know and I was told

MIA & Diplo: Baile Funk One (Hollertronix)

Take your faces from LCD's asses; stick them to the right place

The Cornell Hurd Band: This Gun Don't Care Who It Shoots (Bloodshot)

Not many men could stand up to Wanda Jackson's original

Intelligence: The Night Belongs To Microphones (Narnack)

You might not find the new Fall, but you might fall for this

Art Of Fighting: Come Around And Show Me (Bella Union)

A rush of blood to the bends

Lou Barlow: Royalty (Domino)

This fucker's the only one that tears my heart ever since Bonnie saw his darkness

Wolf Eyes: Reaper's Gong (Sub Pop)

Silence for the lamb chops

Elizabeth Harper: Accidental Flirt (Angular)

She knows *Kill Uncle* by heart, yet she understands it, too

The Freak Accident: Another For The Depressed (Alternative Tentacles)

Sooner or later Mould & Hart will see the light from this

The Mae Shi: Vampire Zoo (Kill Rock Stars)

There were times when people lived in caves and believed that Bis were carcashingteenpop

Castanets: We Are The Wreckage (Asthmatic Kitty)

Asthmatic folk with a gently squeezed heart
Radio 94.9, Sundays 8–10pm
mocvestica@yahoo.com

I-r: Anders Hana, Kjetil Bransdahl



ultralyd

Words: **Frances May Morgan**

Photography: **Bec Chalkley**

"I think that so much of current music is dead because there is no room for mistakes," says Frode Gjerstad, the Norwegian sax veteran behind Ultralyd, Stavanger's free rock, doom jazz, Ayler-goes-Metal improv avatars.

Accordingly, the rumble and rummage that begins the quartet's self-titled album on FMR Records is a random rolling-around-under-the-stars that's simultaneously as focused and as fierce as a heartbeat; a pulling together of disparate sound (squalling, seagull sax, a guitar undertow as dark as the sea, drums and bass of deepest Doom) into a breathtakingly direct assault that comes from all angles and eviscerates on all registers. It blisters and sears, but plays and frolics. And yeah, it's old and it's young.

See, not to move too neatly from music to fact here, you understand, but Gjerstad's longstanding commitment to free sound encompasses a strong desire to work with and learn from those of other ages and disciplines.

"Anders [Hana, guitar], Morten [Olsen, drums] and I have played together on and off since they were about 16," he explains. "I have for a long time tried to involve young musicians in my projects because I think it's important to pass on what you know. And then of course I get back lots of energy and new views on music and life in general."

"It's a bit unusual to have such a wide generation gap in a band, but I think this is very important in a time where everything is very streamlined. I do not understand why age should be a criterion for being in a band."

The addition of Noxagt's Kjetil Bransdahl on bass gives Ultralyd's music a thundering, earthy timbre that sets it apart from the more intense, overtly experimental quality

I-r: Reenie, Kate, Emma, Screech, Dorian



the long blondes

Words: **Hayley Avron**

Photography: **Cat Stevens**

First witnessed playing a ridiculously charming, falling-apart-at-the-tuning-pegs gig in a working men's club in Leeds, The Long Blondes are bound in broken romanticism. The name was intended to "Invoke Forties film glamour," says Dorian (guitar). "Ooh, nooo, I didn't know that until now!" coos Emma (guitar, vocals), in her deceptively dizzy Geordie accent.

Their harsher critics have accused them of style over substance. They do, after all, look as if they all fell out of the same charity-shop changing cubicle. First in line for the defence is drummer Screech with a simple theory: "When you play a gig, you want to put on a show. And

if people are gonna say it, we might as well play up to it."

"The Beatles had an image," adds Dorian. "They were one of the most dressy-up bands, ever. No one minds that."

The oestrogen levels present in The Long Blondes' composition – they've a female:male ratio of 3:2 – dictates that, inevitably, they have been compared to Blondie more than once.

"It's lazy," says Dorian.

It sure is, say I. The Long Blondes sound less like Debbie's crew than the kind of racket you'd get from Phil Spector's studio. When he's out at lunch.

Luckily, the Long Blondes have found some kindred spirits. Russell Senior, formerly of Pulp, has asked to play viola on their records. The Angular Recording Corporation has put out their music. People have seen them and formed their own bands.

Dorian says, "We didn't know there was a set way to do things. A lot of people say you've got to sit and learn in your bedroom for ages before you can play."

Emma: "When we started, people were like, you've gotta work hard. Does that mean you've got to practise loads?"

Screech: "We do work hard, though. Because we do it all ourselves."

The Long Blondes may not have been born with silver tuning pedals in their mouths but fuck, they know how to write a rocking tune (as their Christmas song 'Christmas Is Cancelled', available throughout December on the band's website, proved). The DIY ethic (minus the determination to stay underground) is spreading its roots and The Long Blondes are there in their high heels, watering cans aloft, helping it to grow.

www.thelongblondes.co.uk

tibi lubin

Words: **Alistair Fitchett**

Photography: **Mark Connelly**



If you were the kind of person who liked to connect the dots of Pop, then one of the loveliest lines imaginable would be one that meandered its way from The Shangri-Las to Claudine Longet to Marine Girls to Young Marble Giants to Slumber Party. That Glasgow three-piece Tibi Lubin would be somewhere on that line is just one reason to fall desperately in love with them. Another reason would be that they recognise the Pop genius of Sandy Salisbury.

Katie Stewart (vocals, guitar; above left): "We practise harmonies by singing Sandy's songs, although no one can reach his falsetto. His songs have beautiful melody lines that you can play around with. And the big, layered numbers stand as lovely, simple songs when you pare them down to a minimal arrangement."

Would you cover one of his songs?

"Maybe. I like the interpretive cover song process.

In the past it was more about the song itself, and what the artist brought to the particular song. This idea seems to have been revived somewhat with Cat Power and Quixotic.

of other Norwegian brews of improv, noise and metal, Jazzkammer and Lasse Marhaug springing (or rather, grinding and sparking) to mind. "I did a couple of albums with Lasse Marhaug," says Gjerstad. "Our concept was me acoustic without a microphone, him full blast! Sometimes he drove over me and

there are, so far, no rules for this kind of improv. Noise, in particular, has a very strong element of improvisation in it. And there are all the ecstatic sounds, which to me are very fascinating. I am using my sax to try and incorporate those electronic sounds into my acoustic sounds.

'There are, so far, no rules for this kind of improv'

sometimes he allowed me to be heard. I thought it was very nice and natural..."

Gjerstad's musical career is impossible to sum up here, beginning in the late Sixties and scrolling through years of dedicated improvisation. He cites as a big influence the British drummer John Stevens, with whom he played from the early Eighties, up until Stevens' death in 1994. But a quick look through biographies and interviews reveals a life of twists and turns and encounters and surprises, echoed, perhaps, in the eddying currents of his saxophone lines, which tie themselves in infernal knots before reaching out as far as the eye can see.

Despite his jazz background, though, he says, "What I like about Ultralyd's music is that it's not jazz improvisation. It's more based on metal and noise, and

That such a fluid area of musical convergence seems to have found its lair in this anarchic, yet grounded, Scandinavian scene isn't surprising. The most intense commitment can produce the most abandoned, enjoyable chaos, and Norwegians take their experimental music so seriously that, paradoxically, the resulting sound's often tricksterish, capricious, and fun.

It's noise chess and jazz Scrabble and metal Twister, and – judging by few shows and recordings that have come our way so far – Ultralyd are representing south-west Norway at all three. March 2005 sees the release of *Chromosome Gun* on the mighty Load label (also home to Noxagt). To come: head-to-head sonic combat with Sightings? We can hope.

www.loadrecords.com



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"I'm not too interested in comedy covers or those with the intention of showing the artists' distance – politically or aesthetically – from the original work. Those big statements have been made. Devo did 'Satisfaction' decades ago. Cat Power's version of 'Satisfaction' worked because it seemed she'd found something there she liked to play and sing."

One more reason to love Tibi Lubin is that they are hard to pin down. On the evidence of last year's *I Don't See You As A Dead Girl* album (Rev-Ola), they make music that has clear Pop genealogy but that naturally transcends traditional ideas of Pop as being for The Kids, and Rock as being for the Grown Ups (or for the dull and unimaginative Kids who like to think themselves above the fripperies of Pop).

It's music by a group who seem naturally inquisitive, and willing to allow their art to grow organically into new directions.

Katie: "I like artists who are out of, say, their twenties, and are really developing or finding their voices. I'm not into the cult of dying young. I like longevity, a body of work with flaws and experimental directions, rather than two albums. There's so many great, committed artists in for the long haul, and they get ignored in favour of the latest Emperor's New Clothes."

Tibi Lubin's clothes, meanwhile, would be cut from lace, sequinned with rusted razorblades and topped off with feathered *chapeaux* made of Man Ray photographs. They are assuredly in for the long haul. I suggest you join them.

www.tibilubin.com

50pbadges.com



50pbadges.com



things we like

Illustration: John Bagnall

on tour: Todd

Craig Clouse (vocals, guitar, bass): When I was in the band Crown Roast in the early Nineties we had a mid west tour planned in the US. Somehow all the shows except Chicago and Madison, Wisconsin got cancelled. We drove 22 hours to Chicago from Texas and played for three people – the sound guy, our driver and some guy who worked at the Touch And Go records warehouse. After the show the guy asks us if we would like to come back to the Touch And Go offices and meet Steve Albini. Yes! Finally things are looking up. I could see us hanging out in some fancy office, smoking cigars, drinking beer, hitting a party afterwards and maybe getting invited to a Shellac rehearsal – whatever. When we got to the Touch And Go building we were led to the basement where Albini and a few other people were folding record sleeves for the first Shellac record, *Action Park*. After a very brief introduction we were assigned duties and put to work folding *Action Park* sleeves. He didn't talk to us; he just sort of kept an eye on the production line – quality control. After 20 minutes I slumped into a sort of humiliated depression and snuck out to sleep in the frozen van. The next day we drove four hours to Madison. When we got to the venue they had no idea who

the fuck we were. We turned the van around and drove 26 hours back to Austin. Even though it was freezing outside, our driver had the air conditioning on full blast so he wouldn't fall asleep. We never played another show outside of Texas after that.

let's dance: Sufjan Stevens

I dance to King Sunny Ade's *Juju Music*. Listen to what the talking drums have to say. They are speaking to your dancing shoes.

i want: Sleater-Kinney

Corin Tucker (guitar, vocals): The Q chord made by Suzuki! It comes in a bag that looks like a tennis racket, and it has many many buttons on it. It's kind of a cross between an autoharp and an accordion, but all electronic.

i want: Delia Gonzales and Gavin Russom

Although not one instrument *per se* it, would be fascinating to experiment in depth with infrasound. This is the frequency spectrum below what human beings can hear as sound, bass below bass. There have been and are several mechanisms that create these tones; from the giant infrasound organ built by Dr. Gavreau in the early Seventies (a pipe organ

but with pipes up to six feet in diameter) which, when powered up, nearly destroyed the building it was being tested in and the people present, to the malfunctioning exhaust fan in Vic Tandy's laboratory that created the impression of a poltergeist by generating a 19Hz infrasonic frequency. Many church and hall organs generate tones well below the audible range, and it is claimed that certain instruments used in Tibetan tantric orchestras, such as rkang gling (trumpets made of human thigh-bones), produce tones at the resonant frequency of the human body (19Hz). At high volumes these tones are quite dangerous, but at low volumes infrasound is associated with profound meditative states, loss of inhibition and ego, and ecstatic behaviour. Of course, infrasound is widely present in natural phenomena like thunder, the ocean, and certain communication techniques of animals.

misunderstood: Pro Forma

Simon Henderson (programming, guitar, keyboards): Almost all lyrics have come about by a random mix of Burroughs-esque cut up text and Chinese whispers style miscomprehension. The sole line of a song becomes a full verse after the singer's girlfriend butts in with random interpretations from the next room. Or a chorus comes from the bass player not getting her ears round the verse of an earlier track. Recycling our own mistakes has always been something we've been good at...

rarities: Mountain Goats

John Darnielle (guitar, vocals): What's the most expensive record I own? Depends on whether expensive means what I paid for it, or what it's worth. If the latter, probably the Big Black 'Headache' 12-inch in the original black vinyl packaging, with attendant seven-inch on red vinyl, poster, etc. I bought it new for eight bucks or so. If the former – well, I sold my original pressing of Prince's *Black Album* (from the brief window during which it was in legitimate release back in 1987), for which I'd paid a hundred bucks. That leaves *Einstein On The Beach* by Philip Glass, on Tomato, in near mint. Fifty bucks. I prefer buying in bulk to big-ticket items.

design for life: Kanye West

I dislike the fog and the weather in England but I like the shopping a lot. Selfridges, Liberty – I like those kinds of places. I like the architecture a lot. The interior design is really incredible, it's killer. My suitcases are always packed heavy with decorating and style magazines. I'm still working on my place.

first record: Laibach

Ivan: The first record I ever bought was a seven-inch single by Bridget Bardot. I was about seven years old at the time and I don't remember any of the songs on it. She was a real star. Serge Gainsbourg did the arrangements on the record.



Photography: Mike Baluk



synergy: Gold Chains and Sue Cie

We always imagined 'Show Us Your Heart' to be a good soundtrack for a scene from a movie where someone is driving through a town and as they pass a person they look up and smile, give a thumbs-up, wink, make eye contact, show some sign of human compassion. As the song progresses there are more and more people following this car around on bikes, on foot, in wheelchairs or whatever means of transportation, and eventually the whole town is smiling and chanting. Then the camera would track to two people: a boy and a girl in the middle of some important looking building with a small briefcase with blinking lights on it. They would look each other in the eye, smile, start making out – and set off a nuclear bomb in the middle of the city. The camera would then pan out up into space and show hundreds more bombs simultaneously going off in cities all around the world. It's not about the bombs. It's all about the look in their eyes before they kiss.



Photography: Simon Fernandez

I mean, the things I appreciate are small and probably things y'all take for granted, like having those lights on the border of the walls. It looks cool. Another example is having sinks where you got one little metal thing coming out, and some wood and a bowl on top. You see that all the time here, it's stylish. That's special in America.

first record: Brakes

Eamon Hamilton (guitar, vocals): The first song I remember riveting me was Tracey Ullman's 'They Don't Know About Us'. I must have been about five or six, we'd just moved from Papua New Guinea to this country full of riots and royal weddings and I was hearing all this music I'd never heard before, but this song sounded like a lightning bolt through crystal. The first record I paid for was Ray Parker Junior's 'Ghostbusters'. I went halves on it with my older brother. It sent us crazy, leaping around shooting apparitions and bustin' ghosts. The first album I bought was *Never Mind The Bollocks, Here's The Sex Pistols*, from Trading Post in Stroud. For a whole week I was the king rebel of the second year, until Steve Harding brought in a copy of *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back*, which kind of changed everything.

first love: Jens Lekman

I was 19 and all my friends were hippies. They took me to an animal liberation party where I met her. We went out a couple of times but every time I tried to kiss her something strange happened. Like once a seagull attacked me. We had been sitting by the ocean on a cold December evening for three hours and I couldn't feel my hands anymore. And just when I decided to kiss her a big seabird started circling around my head and tried to bite me.

My best memory is when we decided to buy each other a cell phone. She started sending me these messages with tasks like "meet me tonight, bring a plastic bag" or "paint a dirty word on the white car outside my house". And I would do it (even though I knew it was her father's car). Some of it was sort of illegal and I was almost caught a few times. But I did anything for her.

The end was very painful because I didn't have any other friends at that time, except for the hippies I hung out with, but they were more her friends than mine. It all collapsed when we ended up in the riots during the EU convention in Gothenburg. I thought such a frightening experience would bring us closer but the fact that it didn't made me realise that things weren't going to work out. I stopped eating for two

five songs for winter: Patrick Wolf

Chet Baker: The Thrill Is Gone

I am the most Technicolor sunshine pop person in the summer months, but when the winter really kicks me in the stomach around late November it becomes time to play dead among a warm nest of blankets and songs. Chet's voice and somnambulistic delivery never fails to enter me into a state of tender bliss.

Kate Bush: Houdini

It's the string parts that tuck the duvet in for me, and the "Rosabel, believe" bit. On this totally transcendent song from a magical album (*The Dreaming*), hovering somewhere between spirit and consciousness, Kate pulls out a Houdini metaphor from her magic bag and stretches it across a love song.

Threnody Ensemble: Tharoman (formerly Valerie White) Part 1

Now entering the land of nocturnal snowdrifts and slow trains, the Threnody Ensemble conjure up some rare emotions on the *Timbre Hollow* album. Winter music to be experienced when everyone is still sleeping, on the wasteland between the city and the forest.

Olivier Messiaen: Abyss Of The Birds

From the 'Quartet For The End Of Time', written by Messiaen in a concentration camp during World War Two and performed by its prisoners. Although written in the depths of darkness, the music reaches out for better days. For those hours when you forget the spring is ever going to come again. I first heard this performed at the Royal Albert Hall, and I have never experienced such a heavy, sacred silence descend on an audience.

Britney Spears: Everytime

One of the few songs penned by Mrs Spears-Federline herself. Although a long time fan, I do admit surprise at finding myself genuinely touched by one of her songs. Produced with a spectre of a toy piano and sparse, deeply honest gut bass kicks, the fragile combination of confessional and ghostlike vocals is both heartbreaking and also the perfect companion with which to curl up and hibernate.

weeks and got sick because she didn't want to talk to me and then it was over.

Now she's just released her first collection of poems and we're still friends. She's the weirdest and coolest girl I've ever met and I haven't had a relationship since we broke up. I keep falling in love like once a week but everyone seems so boring in comparison to her.



Words: **Everett True**
Photography: **Charles Peterson**

sibling revelry

Forget all you think you know about music
Smoosh make truly instinctual pop

Smoosh are two sisters from Seattle, Asya (known as Asy) and Chloe, aged 12 and 10.

Asy sings, writes the songs and plays keyboards. Chloe drums and adds harmonies. They have a younger sister, Maia, who is learning the bass. She drew the cover to their debut album, the utterly charming *She Like Electric*.

Motivation? If it's fun, they'll do it.

It's during the adolescent years that feelings are heightened, that the outside world is at its most confusing. Commentators wonder how young people can sing the blues when they have no 'real' life experiences to draw upon. But when you're young, emotions are so on edge, life seems so vivid, each day lasts forever, each upset lasts an eternity, you can do little else but howl. No one's happy between the ages of 10 and 19, or if they are, they're extraordinarily so; or unthinking ciphers with no thoughts of their own.

Smoosh sing the blues. They might be young. So? All around me, my whole life, people have been telling me that art is instinctual. Why should it matter, then, at what age it's created? Seems sometimes that all musicians and artists learn to do, as they develop their 'craft', is how to mask their emotions better, how to rid themselves of all the awkward edges and feelings. My whole life, all around me, folk have spoken about 'purity' in music as if it's some holy grail to be attained: who better then to reach that 'purity' than a pair of kids who weren't even born when *Nevermind* was released? You're easily influenced as a kid – because you're so open, and suggestible – but this is a plus point. You take on ideas without cynicism, and hence have an innocence that some artists spend their whole careers trying to rediscover.

The ages of 15 and 16 were the most depressing time of my life: unsettling, full of constant letdowns and putdowns. Some kids mature and become aware of the outside world earlier than that. And if that doesn't give them the right to sing the blues, I don't know what does.

Heaven and hell starts right here.

show and tell

Tell me a story from yesterday.

Asy: "I'm Asy. Yesterday we had three shows. The first one we went to really early in the morning; and when Chloe finished one of the songs she fell on the drum set. It was an accident. It was funny."

Were you trying to be destructive, like an old school grunge band?

Chloe: "I wish I could break it so I could get a new one."

Asy: "Then we went to the [all ages venue] Vera Project. It was like a party we were playing for. There were breakdancers. It was fun."

Tell me a story from last week.

Chloe: "I can't remember."

OK. Tell me a story from earlier today.

Chloe: "Today? Well, I woke up. I had pancakes. Then I went outside and onto the tramp[oline] with Asy. I took a shower and then I went with my dad to get one of my drums fixed. Then I went over here."

I know what you're thinking: cutesy American siblings with long blond hair, beloved by US commercial alternative radio and soft drinks sponsors (Jones Soda): Hanson. You're wrong,

'When I'm 18...I'm going to have my own room and I will have all these guitars hanging up on the wall'

although fuck man, there ain't nothing wrong with that even if it were true – 'Mmm Bop' is one of the great disposable bubblegum pop singles of the Nineties, an equal to Outkast's 'Hey Ya', easy.

For a start, Asy's songs are too introspective to be mistaken for production line pop. Also, the sound on the album is oddly restrained, the barest of overdubs and studio trickery. Comparison points aren't too discernible: perhaps a little hip hop on the mock-hipster early Eighties synth-led 'Rad' (a song that causes crowd surfing among excitable Pearl Jam fans); maybe some Fiona Apple or Tori Amos on the more downbeat 'Massive Cure' and 'Make It Through'; even schoolyard K Records-style bands such as Corin Tucker's teen Riot Grrrl outfit Heavens To Betsy or the ebullient Girls At Our Best, on the frantic and lovable 'Bottlenose'. But the artist Asy most recalls in her strange, naïve keyboard patterns and phrasing is obscure NYC poet Marianne Nowotny – an artist you could bet a million Hilary Duff pillows Asy has never encountered. Also, it feels odd to be comparing a brace of genuine schoolgirls to other bands that, twice their age, borrow heavily from the secret languages of the classroom.

Perhaps you're now thinking: The Shaggs (legendary early Seventies Outsider band whose lack of conventional musical knowledge was more than balanced by their fortuitous atmospheric clout). Wrong! These two girls can most certainly play. They know how to structure a song. Turn a lyric. Wow a partisan crowd of Sleater-Kinney or Death Cab For Cutie or Rilo Kiley or Jimmy Eat World fans. And reduce a journalist to embarrassed silence.

the grunge inquisition

The scene: a brightly lit coffee shop just round the corner from Seattle's Showbox on 1st Ave. The hum and clatter of the espresso machine is offset by excited giggles and chatter: the two girls have just come off stage as support to kooky Seattle rock band Presidents Of The United States Of America,

and the relief is tangible. Asy (thoughtful, future Alicia Keys in the making) is drinking hot chocolate and bewailing the fact she didn't interact more with the audience. Chloe (cooler, obvious Kim Deal potential) is eating banana bread. Not

having much experience of pre-teen girls I'm unnerved by their inquisitive natures. I'm also slightly awed by their confidence on stage in front of a crowd of baying rock fans ("Smooooooooosh! Smooooooooosh!") holding up cell phones and cigarette lighters during their slower numbers.

So we start off with an easy question: Tell me about some of your favourite bands.

Chloe: "Death Cab For Cutie..."

(Simultaneously) "Pearl Jam."

Chloe: "...Nirvana..."

Asy: "Smoosh."

Chloe: "Sleater-Kinney, Catpower... why would Smoosh be your favourite band?"

Asy: "I was just teasing. That's enough bands."

So you like the grunge?

Asy: "Grunge and indie. I like all kinds of music. I like Alicia Keys. I like some stuff, like major artists." Chloe: "I like Interpol as well."

What do you like about grunge? Do you know anything about Nirvana?

Asy: "Not really, but my dad told me that you introduced Courtney Love to Kurt Cobain. Is that true?"

Yeah, I guess.



Asy: "Well, do you think Courtney Love killed Nirvana, I mean Kurt Cobain – or do you think he killed himself? Because if Courtney Love made someone kill him then you would have started the grunge scene, and you would have ended it too."

Chloe: "I can't believe you said that!"

I don't believe I began and ended it.

Asy: "You don't think you began it?"

Well... I don't know. No. Maybe.

Chloe: "Don't you know?"

Asy: "When our dad got your message [on the phone] he said, 'Oh jeez!', and he was like, 'Everett True called, he started all the grunge!'"

rock family trees

By the time she was in kindergarten, Asy was writing songs. "She always jokes, before I could walk I used

to play, but it's true," dad Mike relates. "We had this toy piano that she'd crawl up to, and she'd use it to stand and just bang away. She'd be like six months old and on it for an hour. By the time she was two, she'd watch a Disney movie, waddle up to that thing and pick out the melody on one finger. Then she'd start to do both hands, doing one finger. Then she'd use multiple fingers to do the same thing – finally, she started writing songs."

Mike is affable, smart and smiley. He acts (and probably is) continually surprised and pleased by the amount of attention his daughters are receiving. It's fun. He looks far younger than his age (40 this year) – laidback and judo-hip, the sort of dad every rock'n'roll kid would wish for, currently finishing a degree in molecular biology, acting as "Mr Mom" (his words) while wife Maria finished training as

a paediatrician. The couple grew up in Chicago and met at the University Of Illinois. They have a fourth kid, Scout, still in diapers; plus a black Labrador called Loni, and a white cat named Yoshen.

Neither parent has any musical background:

"None at all," Mike laughs. "My wife had to suffer classical piano lessons, which she hated. This was a mutation, I think. We used to play the girls a bit of everything: rock'n'roll, classical, jazz..."

'Backstage, Eddie Vedder was teaching us yoga'

The label

What made you want to sign Smoosh?

Clay (Pattern 25 Records): "When I first heard about them I expected something cute and charming. When I finally listened, it was cute and charming in a little girl sort of way, but it was also incredibly accomplished. There was a surprising level of complexity in the arrangements. All good pop music has this, there's more to it that meets the ear, and

that's definitely how it was with them. Also, they never lose the groove. Just to have that level of sophistication at their age was unbelievable to me.

They were playing the Sunset the next night, and I was blown away. I went back to my label partners and told them we've got to sign them. The parents were hesitant to sign their kids, so we spent a lot of time getting to know each other. It's been a really, really fun project. They're also amazing artists. They have great, stylised illustrations.

A friend did the design, and he picked out the one by Maia. All the girls are so talented."

Where does the talent come from?

"If I knew that, I'd duplicate it, manufacture it and mass produce it. The parents are a big part of it. They're home schooled. They read Arthur Miller... A large part of it is instinctual."

Has the CD done well?

"It's doing really well."

but it'd be popular classical, popular jazz. They've opened up a musical world to me and I love it."

Can you describe your parents?

Asy: "Um, Bubba is a scientist – we call our dad Bubba. And our mum's a doctor. They're kind of different from other parents. They let us play shows in bars, and sometimes they're smoky and stuff. [To Chloe, who's acting agitated] OK. You go now."

Chloe: "Well, they're different and they let us play bars. [Asy prods her, to make her stop repeating her words.] They're protective. I always have to carry a cell phone. But they let us play shows."

Asy: "My dad, sometimes he doesn't like us when we dress all weird. My mum gives us ideas for modern clothes. My dad just wants us to wear big T-shirts and jeans, like the rocker style, because he thinks we look like big colourful girls going into

a bar. And my dad has good taste in music. He likes Nirvana, Soundgarden and Interpol, all those kinds of bands. My mum listens to Enya."

Asy sounds disgusted: me, too. Incidentally, if you're wondering how I could recommend a band to you that sound a little like Fiona Apple or Tori Amos, it's because Smoosh aren't fake, wailing artisans trying their hardest to sound like little girls. Smoosh are little girls. Always go to the source.

word painting

Smoosh started two years ago.

Chloe got a drum kit when she was six – "essentially by accident," says Mike – and began taking lessons at the Seattle Drum School from Jason McGerr (now with Death Cab For Cutie). One day Asy told Jason, "I can play piano, you know?" so he asked her to bring it in, and started to put Chloe's drum parts to Asy's songs. The trio got half a dozen songs together, and made a demo for the website (www.smoosh.com).

"So we entered them in this battle of bands thing at the I Spy," Mike continues. "The people who did the sound there let the Vera Project know about them – and they emailed us asking to do a show, April 2003. That's where it started."

Asy: "I already had songs I made up and Chloe played along with them. I was so nervous to do little tiny café shows and stuff. I wasn't thinking, 'I want to be a star'. I just wanted to get my music known."

When you're young and inexperienced, you have a certain fearlessness that gets knocked out of you with age. This is what Smoosh have, among many other attributes. There's no artifice here, or if there is, it's of the fanciful, poetic variety: one where emotions are painted in broad sweeps of colour, and every minor upset becomes a crisis. Except, oddly, this doesn't hold entirely true – Asy holds a mirror up to feelings that are often confused, grey, helpless: "I've got my own problems to fix," she sings. Other times, she's more obviously child-like: "Oh the sun is out tonight/That I can't help myself" ('To Walk Away From').

She's also continually encouraging the subjects of her songs not to let themselves be dragged down by circumstance:

"If you're trying to play/Go play, maybe football/Maybe get on a soccer team/You can help them," she instructs, coming over all Hermione Granger, on 'Rad'.

songs of experience

Is it important to be proficient?

Asy: "We actually never practise. Our shows are practice. We don't have a schedule."

Where do you rehearse?

Asy: "In our basement. In our guest bedroom. When we have space."

How do you write lyrics?

Asy: "I don't write lyrics. I just make them up as we play. These days I've been forgetting the lyrics to 'Rad'. If you think about it, you forget them."

What are your songs about?

Asy: "Some are kind of sad. Some of them are about optimistic things, like just 'Go out and take risks, it doesn't matter, don't be afraid'. They're not about people I know. I just write then about people in general."

What is there to be sad about?

Asy: "I don't know. I can't think of anything happy because I'm like a kid, so I'm limited in what I can sing about. So."

Later, I ask their dad where he thinks the songs come from. "I don't know," he replies. "She doesn't seem totally depressed! I don't think I depress her that much! [Laughs] Maybe from school, friends,

The popstar

When did you first encounter Smoosh?

Jason Finn (drummer, Presidents Of The United States Of America): "Last year. We were looking for supports at the Showbox, and Stone Gossard [Pearl Jam] mentioned we could do a lot worse than Smoosh. I had no idea what he was talking about. My first real experience of them was when they hit the stage. It was the most affected I've been by a band for years."

The last time I got those sort of goosebumps was when I saw Pretty Girls Make Graves."

I told them what you said about how they could be as big as Led Zeppelin and they said, "Wow, that's cool...Is that big?"

"And you said, 'Yes, that at one time was considered large-ish' [Laughs] Led Zeppelin will probably be next in their collection. They've clearly heard some New Wave and Beatles and stuff."

Why do you like them so much?

"It's a combination. There's utterly no need to use or acknowledge the fact they are very young girls because they are great songwriters. On a level playing field, they are going to kick your ass. There's no doubt about it."

"And the fact they happen to be these gorgeous 12- and 10-year-old girls is so ass-kicking at the same time..."

"I get confused. I'm getting confused right now."

movies, TV...She says it's not from real life. I've read stuff where people dismiss Smoosh and say the words don't mean much because they have no life experience. But that's silly!"

Do you get upset a lot?

Asy: "No. Well, sometimes. But not always."

Do you upset her a lot?

Chloe: "Um. Well. Sorta."

Asy: "We don't fight a lot. I just laugh at her sometimes because she's weird. You are! Like in the car today, she's kind of...Sorry! We don't fight but sometimes she's a little bit annoying."

Chloe: "Well, sometimes Asy is a little bit weird, so she makes me want to fight with her."

You were going to ask Maia to play on stage tonight?

Asy: "She was supposed to practise with us. She knows how to play the songs, but she's off time. She knows how to play good chords, but she can't keep the beat at all."

local heroes

I think Kurt Cobain would've loved you guys.

Asy: "Was he nice?"

Yeah.

Asy: "Do you think that we would know him?"

'We don't fight a lot. I just laugh at her sometimes because she's weird'

Probably. You're a Seattle band. He lived in Seattle. I'm sure he would've asked you to support Nirvana.

Asy: "If I got to choose and I was a big band, I wouldn't choose us to open."

Really? You don't think you're as good as other bands? You're better than other bands.

Asy: "What I mean is, I like other bands better because they have a fuller sound. I'm learning how to play guitar. I have two songs I made up on it."

That's good. You should play guitar on stage.

Asy: "Yeah. I'm working on it."

Do you know Eddie Vedder?

Asy: "Yeah. He's nice. Backstage, he was teaching us yoga. There were all these fruit, and Jason McGerr was there too, and we were throwing oranges everywhere."

Were you getting into trouble?

Asy: "No, but one of the oranges went in the boys' bathroom and Chloe went to get it."

Chloe: "Well. I didn't know."

Do you get in much trouble when you play live?

Chloe: "Why are you looking at me?"

I think it's probably you.

Chloe: "Why?"

[Both collapse in fits of giggles.]

What do you want to do when you're 18?

Asy: "I want to be in a band – well, if it's still fun I want to be in a band..."

With your sister?

Asy: "Maybe."

Chloe: "Maybe?"

Asy: "Well, yes, but I want there to be someone else in it too."

Chloe: "You're not going to replace me."

Asy: "No. Someone else, too – like a bass or something. And I want to do soccer too. Oh, and if I'm 18 I'd like to either go to college in France or – well, not in America. If I'm still at my parents' I want to move to a different house because at our house it's one floor and my bedroom is tiny and it's not private at all. I'm going to have my own room and I will have all these guitars hanging up on the wall."

What about you, Chloe?

Chloe: "Oh! I want to be in a band still. I used to want to be an actress. Asy and I used to play making movies on our tramp. You know our CD name, *She Like Electric*? That was one of the movie names."

artistic differences

It seems that Chloe's more of a rock star than Asy on stage.

Mike: "That's true. For every song that Asy makes, Chloe is flailing at the drums. If they fight musically that's always the issue – Chloe's drumming like a rock star, even on Asy's slower songs, and it drives Asy crazy but they work it out. The way they were at the end tonight [Chloe slapping hands before she walked off stage] is totally predictable from their personalities. That never surprises me."



'Music can be straight from the heart and have a big concept around it'



king of neon

Words: **Frances May Morgan**
Photography: **Joe Dilworth**

Baroque electronic antiquarians **Jeans Team** dream of a Berlin-on-Sea

"We have now a real museum of instruments," says Reimo Herfort, philosophically, surveying the chunky, wood-encased instrument in the middle of the studio floor. It's an old Roland digital harpsichord. I crouch down and play a chord on it: warm, sonorous, synthetic baroque. "Peter Greenaway," Reimo nods, deadpan.

Henning Watkinson explains how they found it in a local second-hand shop for 170 euros: a bargain. Now, he says, "everyone uses computer plug-ins. They don't want all this heavy stuff."

Reimo says, "we always say we have to minimise our stuff; we have to get small things. And then we go and buy even bigger things."

What about when you go on tour? I ask. I guess you can't take it all.

"No, we do!" says Henning. "And we take our neon sign with us too."

On the far wall of the studio – a small room in east Berlin, filled with wires and knobs and things that go whoosh – hangs the large neon sign that proclaims the band's name in a pale blue, retro handwriting font that signifies a long-obsolete kind of High Street sophistication. It's a real shop sign, Henning tells me with pride. "We are trying to get it linked to the music for the next tour."

Jeans Team – then consisting only of Reimo and Franz Schütte – first performed in 1996, at a Berlin gallery opening. "There were two of us on video and two onstage," Reimo claims, confusingly, adding that they were more of a rock band, influenced by Spacemen 3 and The Telescopes. Joined by real members Henning and Gunther Kreis in 1997, their first singles were unhinged little creatures with prickly, sugary synth hooks, big slabs of punky guitar and an awkward, galloping rhythm section. Burying the rock influences somewhere along the way, 2000's *Ding Dong* was quintessential electro sweetness peppered with a light touch of musical anarchy. Then, in 2002, we all seemed to be dancing and smiling to the poinging, pulsing, metallic nursery rhymes on the 'Gold und Silber' EP, a piece of purist yet insouciant hedonism that could make your vision go Cubist at the edges.

Three years on, and 'Berlin Am Meer' envisages a Berlin-on-Sea, a laidback coastal city within a serious, landlocked country. A house tune carefree as an ice-cream, it heralds the start of *Musik Von Oben*, a new album that's a veritable pleasure cruise of happy accidents and blissful experiments.

"'Berlin am Meer' is about this longing for something that isn't there," says Henning.

"Sometimes you go through Alexanderplatz and you can really imagine the sea being just around the corner, a little bit like Barcelona."

It's a great beginning to an album, I say.

Reimo agrees, but says, "For everyone here in Germany it's like a stone in their way."

"It's true," says Henning. "All the interviews in Germany we had so far were all like, 'OK, so what's with 'Berlin Am Meer'? Isn't Berlin boring, isn't the whole Berlin hype 'over'?"

So let's talk about Berlin. Like all good cities, it changes almost daily; like all good cities, its creative inhabitants exhibit a love/hate relationship with that change, regarding with fascination the day-to-day transformations wrought by their initial input, and working harder to subvert, progress and keep moving – or opt out. It's less elitism than survival. East London's trajectory from art pragmatists' playground to latte-fuelled, media-employed hipster freeway is an obvious parallel to Mitte's seemingly unstoppable rise, but, as Reimo says, "East Berlin has a new history. It has a very young history."

When Henning first arrived there in 1994, he says, "It was a totally new universe. People like us, in our early twenties, had the feeling that they could do anything. They could make every building their own. That's a really powerful feeling that you cannot have in other cities, I think, because Berlin is far more...ready. It's more grown-up."

Now, he says, he sometimes goes west, because it's "A rather normal, functioning big city; and I find it quite relaxing. Over here, if you go down Rosenthalerstrasse, it's all shoe stores and coffee shops and it seems like everybody's into youth culture, and not into normal life."

The sprawling textures and gentle playfulness of *Musik Von Oben* are, indeed, those of a band cavalierly exploring new – and old – territory. Their trademark metronomic bounce is still present ('Oh Bauer' and 'Nonstop Nonstop Nonstop'), but odd flourishes abound: Romanian singer Sonya Moraru's tense vocal on 'Moara Mea', for example. Or the lazily unhinged 'Boat Song', which comes on like a sonic show-and-tell around every available facet of electronic exotica – although Jeans Team have always, it must be said, excelled at the "so what does that Syn-Marimba setting sound like again?" school of pop.

The break between releases stems, partly, from a change in record company, from iconic electro label Kitty-Yo to the brand-new Louisville. But also, says Reimo, "We said, step back and do a good recording. It doesn't matter how long it takes."

Using Berlin's *Metropolis*-like financial centre, with its angled, teetering mirrored skyscrapers and forest of cranes and scaffolding, as an analogy, Henning says: "Like with Potsdamerplatz, everything had to be built really quickly after the fall of the Wall. Why not leave some empty spaces and wait until you have a good idea how to use them? But instead, they just build something that is already outdated as soon as it's erected."

If we're talking synths instead of architecture, though, the grand sonic designs of the past evidently have a place in Jeans Team's hearts, for all their endorsement of DIY culture and artistic autonomy. I mean, there's that harpsichord, and what's under that blanket in the corner, Henning?

He unveils it with a smile.

"This is our Synclavier!"

The big, blue console, with its clunky monitor and teak-clad keyboard, takes up a whole corner

of the room. One of the first digital synthesisers, the Synclavier was developed in the US in the mid-Seventies and became a staple of Eighties excess, costing thousands of dollars.

"They were total Peter Gabriel instruments," says Henning. "I saw a film with Sting playing one: it was the commercial for it. The monitor is green on black –"

"– they use air force knobs," chimes Reimo.

"Yeah, from B52 bombers," Henning continues. "It's like, no limits!"

The Eighties sheen that characterised its early life is rich source material for the band.

"Since we got it, I'm really into this mid-Eighties heavy production – Art Of Noise is something I enjoy at the moment," Henning explains.

We talk about the boldness, the big musical statements of that time.

"Yeah, that's what I enjoy when I listen to ABC's first three albums," he says. "If you listen to one it's always complete, but then it's a different style for the next album. I like the idea that the group has a certain distance to itself and works on itself more like a piece of art. I like that it doesn't have to be 'authentic' to be moving. It can be straight from the heart and still have a big concept around it."

"In pop music I think you really miss a lot of power or possibilities to say something if you don't get into this concept thing. It's lazy not to do it."

On a roll now, Henning expounds upon his theories of artifice and music, part iconoclastic pop maverick and part serious muso who, says Reimo, buys old *NMEs* on eBay so he can read about Julian Cope. This is very Jeans Team: a rock band who chanced upon the power of beats and bleeps; lovers of concept, costume and camp who operate far away from any mainstream notions of those things.

"Even office people behave like they're in a band," Henink says. "We were invited to a night where these cooks who cook for rock bands were making a dinner, and they looked like a rock band, too. People were saying to us, it's so funny, they look like a rock band, and we were like, yes, but they are cooks, *why* do they look like a rock band? It doesn't make me interested in them!"

Reimo, the one most likely to a strike pose in band photos, sits quiet throughout his bandmate's rant, but nods agreement. I ask him, so what is Jeans Team's onstage concept now? If even the chefs look like rock stars?

There's a pause. Reimo considers.

"Two years ago I was looking like a sailor," he says, finally. "But more a sailor without a job. Not in the white suit, more like a carrying guy who's running around the quay trying to get something for free. Now we are more like...baroque-looking."

Hennink executes a flourish on the harpsichord, and we all laugh. He says, "I don't want to come to a concert and have two hours of really sleepy music with just one guy sitting there with a laptop."

"There has to be some risk. There has to be *something*."



the misfits

Words: **Stevie Chick**
Photography: **Cat Stevens**

The Research make anthems for the awkward

"When I was 13, there was a guy at school that everyone thought was an idiot, and he got bullied all the time. I didn't do a very good job of sticking up for him, but I didn't bully him either. Then he suddenly started being really good at playing the guitar – nobody even knew he could play the guitar – and he became everybody's best friend. And then, again, he got really good at playing basketball, and that made him even more popular. That got all the girls onside as well. So, when I was 13 I decided to learn guitar and to play basketball, which I did. I'm really very good at basketball now, nowhere near as good as he was then, but good. Plus I have a girlfriend, which is what I did it for in the first place. I'm actually much better at playing guitar than the keyboard, but my girlfriend prefers keyboard players."

Russell from The Research pauses a moment and smiles. He comes across like he just stepped out of a John Hughes teen movie; like Duckie in *Pretty In Pink*, or Watts in *Some Kind Of Wonderful*, or (honourable mention) Lloyd Dobler in Cameron Crowe's

'I'm actually much better at guitar, but my girlfriend prefers keyboard players'

Say Anything – outsiders with quick minds and a skewed, philosophical bent, a wry amusement that serves as their defence.

When The Research play live onstage, Russell's the guy sat on the stool, stage-right. Perhaps he's wearing his woolly Elvis sweater, like he is tonight, its home-hewn cosiness at cognitive odds with The King's legendary lipsnarl sensuality. It's a cherishable, knowing gesture that, like The Research's songs, bull's-eyes a very 'indie' charm – of being vulnerable, but proudly so. It's the plucky resolve of the smart-mouth who knows he's going to get pounded by the bullies of the world, but somehow wouldn't have it any other way.

Russell's usually found snarling and cooing into his microphone, while smashing his £9 Cash Converters organ hard against his thighs, so its metallic tones jar and jostle calamitously. Russell's tantrum whine, and his keyboard's robotic, spastic snarl, recall Quasi, the clattering anthems of awkwardness sweetened by the harmonies of bassist Georgia and drummer Sarah. They met in Wakefield, a sleepy town best known as the last stop before Leeds on that long train journey from London.

"It's got a shopping mall, a cathedral, and lots of great bands," enthuses the winsome Sarah of The Research's home town. Inspired by her mum's Carpenters video, Sarah enrolled in drum lessons when she started school, despite measuring about three feet tall. Of Karen Carpenter's influence, she says, "It was cool, after always seeing blokes bashing away at the drums, to see this frail, tiny woman just playing the drums so well. I thought, if she could do it, I could do it."

Georgia's the girl you'll spot stage left, stars in her smoky eyes. "We'd all been bullied at school for different reasons," she muses, of their initial bond. Forced to learn clarinet at school (she can still play 'I Want To Live In America'), she can play the saxophone, and the keyboard "better than Russell", and bemoans her bass-playing lot in life. "The strings hurt my fingers, like cheesewire."

To further pursue the earlier Quasi analogy, if Sam Coomes' morbid mopes are the sound of Charlie Brown's existential angst-made-pop, then Russell's melodic breakdowns – drenched in Buzzcockian frailty but with an ultimately optimistic verve that lightens their humour – owe more to the bookish, wise Linus Van Pelt. The Research have a debut EP out, 'She's Not Leaving', which is really rather fine, but their best song, 'I Love You But...', hasn't been released yet. It's a lovely, spangly, harmony-drenched thing, its simple chorus – "I love you, but I'm scared of fucking up" – so very poignant.

"I used to hate it when bands messed up onstage and got all cross and aggressive about it," offers Sarah. "I feel quite proud that I'm the opposite, I mess up all the time but I don't have a problem with it. In fact, people seem to like it. I think other bands like us for it. Most groups can be quite competitive or grumpy with other bands, but we're not very threatening, I guess. We're always fucking up!"

The modesty isn't feigned. The Research just aren't too hung up on how good they really are. Their homely, ramshackle din will win so many hearts, and they won't even realise it.

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raw spirits

Words: **Leonie Cooper**
Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

The Gin Palace: booze, blues and buses

"I can't promise you money. I can't promise you fame. But fat Belgian men? That I can produce."

It's a rare woman who would accept this invitation to join a band, but to Meaghan Wilkie, The Gin Palace's tiny, growling Australian vocalist, this questionable offer sounded like fun wrapped up in a bundle of glee. Two years down the line, however, Meaghan is miffed.

"I've been waiting, and I haven't seen one yet," she says.

"Soon, soon..." says guitarist Jon Free, with a shifty look.

The Gin Palace are vintage, immaculate, bottled chaos waiting to burst all over your shoes. If they were a person, they'd be a well-dressed old theatre queen – Quentin Crisp, maybe, but even more fabulous – regaling the barkeep of an ancient Soho pub with tales of the good old days, when the girls were glamorous and the boys were cheap. Hell, the boys were free.

expunged it," says Meaghan, "I don't think any of us could ever stomach making some sickly sweet piece of fluff. Singing about pretty things doesn't ever work. It always sounds as if you're being sarcastic, or it's like a bad piece of high-school poetry. It's all a bit wet."

"So we're all about the things that tick you off," explains Jon.

"Well, it's kind of difficult singing about antiques."

"Sometimes we sing about the happy things – dancing, drinking, hating stupid men," Meaghan laughs. "But I'm getting over that last one a bit more."

Ah yes, the booze. The Gin Palace do love their liquor. The title of their 2004 album, *Kicking On*, is an Australian expression for going on somewhere else after the pub chucks you out. And then going somewhere else, and then somewhere else, until you fall over in a pool of your own vomit and wake up on a bus at 2pm

'Singing about pretty things doesn't ever work'

The Gin Palace don't like television. "Have you seen it recently? It's very distressing," says Meaghan, shaking her head. The Gin Palace don't like airports. "They took away our Zippos but let us keep our disposable lighters," mutters drummer Stuart Bell. And the Gin Palace most certainly don't like the new-style bendy buses, replacements for the old Routemaster double-deckers and recently introduced into Stoke Newington, the north London borough where the band are based. "It's just madness when two meet in the street – gridlock!" Stuart continues, dismayed.

"We all just like really old things," they say, and they're not talking about Bruce Forsyth and Mark E Smith. Think, instead, of sumptuous Victorian drinking dens, candles dripping and log fires burning; Irish coffees and books bound in leather.

"I don't understand why people keep on copying the Eighties and the Seventies in their music. They were the two ugliest decades known to man," spits Meaghan, pristine in a fitted black Fifties dress that few could carry off mid-afternoon in a Wetherspoon's pub. "Things that are new just aren't pretty."

"Whining isn't the way forward, but yelling, shouting and telling people what you're pissed off about is. It makes it better because you've

with toddlers staring at you and trying to balance empty crisp packets on your head. Except that would never happen to The Gin Palace, because they're far too classy for that – not to say they haven't come close. But after giving up gin, which makes Meaghan grumpy, and whisky, which makes her mental – "I was scarier than normal when I drank whisky" – she and Jon now have a strict pre-gig diet of vodka and Red Bull.

Stuart, though, sticks with whisky. Red Bull, he says, "Makes me play every song about 20 times faster, and I've finished the set before they've even finished the first song".

What with the booze and with the impression they give, that some kind of suave inner demons are ghost-writing the songs, sometimes it feels as if The Gin Palace have no input into their music at all. But there is one thing that shapes and controls the beautiful bedlam of their bluesy rock'n'roll, and that's the Triumph – Jon and Meaghan's gorgeous, battered old car that squats by the side of the road like a cat purring by the fire. The car is, after all, the reason they did away with the idea of a bass player.

"The three of us, the guitar and amp and drums, just fit into the car – we couldn't have a bassist," they say. "The Triumph defines our sound. If it fits in the car, we'll do it."

lou barlow

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RED MEAT HEART





flora and fauna

Words: **Mia Lily Clarke**
Illustration: **Lindsay Wright**

Deerhoof weave their hypnagogic nursery rhymes

"One night, we went out to a park," says Deerhoof's guitarist, John Dieterich, recounting the adventures of the group's most recent tour of Japan. "There were no lights on anywhere, and there were about 10,000 frogs all making these crazy sounds. And there were fireflies all over the place – millions of them. I remember feeling like it was absolute magic, and wondering if it could be possible that this happened every night."

The thought of Deerhoof's four members wandering around a dainty, flower-filled Japanese garden, reaching out their hands to catch fireflies at midnight, seems suitably apt for a band that enjoys playing with enchanting, dream-like images in their lyrics and music.

Last year's excellent *Milk Man* was centred around a fictional, slightly sinister cartoon milkman (a concept inspired by the drawings of Tokyo-based artist Ken Kagami, who designed the cover artwork) who attempts to lure young children off the sidewalk and into the dark, surreal depths of an alternative world. Throw this beside the cacophony of bunny rabbits and pandas that prowl through the imagination of singer Satomi Matzusaki, and it is easy to understand why Deerhoof's music could appeal to children as much as adults. But their music is not so much childish, as child-like: there is an astute directness in Matzusaki's vibrato-less delivery that eschews sugary naivety in favour of shrewd, descriptive fragments of untamed thought. The placing of these cryptic, deadpan nursery rhymes in the context of the often brittle backdrop of angular guitars and rollicking drumbeats is a neat, if occasionally unsettling, contrast.

Rumour has it that drummer Greg Saunier often wakes up in the middle of the night with potential melodies scratching the peculiar terrain between the conscious and subconscious, waiting to be jotted down and rekindled collectively in the Deerhoof practice room.

"Yes, it's definitely true [about Greg's dreams]," confirms Dieterich. "I'm not sure about Satomi, but I know Chris and I do this on occasion, as well. The trick is convincing your waking mind that it's

worth picking up the tape recorder (or, in Greg's case, the paper and pen) and recording it when you're so comfortable lying in bed."

As a result of Deerhoof's successful jaunts in Japan, plus Satomi's biographical ties, the band are currently completing their half of a split CD with the excellent Tokyo-based quartet, 54-71. All the lyrics will be in Japanese, and it should be available on import from March. In keeping with their burgeoning reputation for prolific and speedy releases, Deerhoof have released an album a year for the last four – John reveals that the group's eighth full-length is to follow in the autumn:

"We have lots of ideas about what we want it to sound like, but we don't really know what's going to happen yet," he says. "I guess I feel like all our albums have a concept, in one way or another, and this one probably will too. I don't think we approach an album with a specific idea, but we do talk about our thoughts, and we try to make something that we can all get behind, and be excited about and believe in and contribute to."

"We all have the same opportunity to write music for Deerhoof, but that has led to varying degrees of contributions from each member from album to album, depending on what else is going on in everyone's lives. For the new album, none of us will have any other bands' albums to be working on, and we will all be living in the same city and be able to devote all of our time and energy to working on it."

"As far as what each of us contributes to Deerhoof," he continues, "it's difficult to describe in words. Chris is a remarkably astute observer of behaviour and has two senses of humour: one for his own secret jokes and one for everything else. Satomi is the most stable of everyone in the band, in a way. I feel like she is the most grounded. Greg is extremely focused and, in turn, is good at making sure the rest of us stay focused. And I bring to the table a supple and detailed gastronomic palate that is discerning, yet never overbearing."

On the heels of *Milk Man*, the band were voted best local band of 2004 in the *San Francisco Weekly*, their hometown

newspaper, and the record was nominated as Outstanding Alternative Album of the Year at the California Music Awards. Clearly, the past 10 years that the group have spent kicking their heels in the dirt of the music industry have been having an effect outside of the underground.

'The trick is convincing your waking mind that it's worth picking up the tape recorder'

"I guess it's nice," says John. "I have no idea who votes on these things. I don't know anyone who has ever voted in one of those polls, so I often wonder."

"I can't speak for anybody else," he adds. "But I feel really lucky to have the support network that we have in San Francisco. In saying that, I guess in a way I do feel a little bit separated from the local music happenings because I'm not here that much and, when I am here, I have a tendency to embed myself in my house. Although I'm working on changing that."

"It's strange because so many of the bands that I know, including us, are on tour for a good portion of the year and don't play in town all that much, so the people I used to run into at shows, I now run into at dinner parties or when waiting in line at the grocery store...wait, is that cool to say?"



Words: **David McNamee**
Photography: **Jonathan Proctor**

a million love

Bob Wratten's *Field Mice* and *Trembling Blue Stars* make music for hearts both broken and healing

Beth: "It's like The Beatles and Wings. We're Wings and I'm Linda McCartney. I don't do much. I'm his girlfriend and I'm just there all the time."

Bob: "You do lots!"

Beth: "I'm Linda McCartney. I stand onstage and play the keyboard a little bit. And I don't eat meat."

Bob Wratten (singer and songwriter of pop groups The Field Mice, Northern Picture Library and Trembling Blue Stars) is discussing the relationship between The Field Mice (The Beatles) and Trembling Blue Stars (Wings) with his other half, former Aberdeen lady and TBS sidekick Beth Artzy. The Field Mice's out-of-print back catalogue is finally due for reissue on the Factory-affiliated LTM label, and a new Trembling Blue Stars album (Wratten's 10th album in total), *The Seven Autumn Flowers* has just surfaced, breaking a three-year silence.

Beth: "They come out a lot quicker when he's unhappy. The process has slowed greatly since he's entered into a relationship!"

The Field Mice were a band in love with the straight lines and fading motifs of modernist pop. For three short years they were the flagship band of the iconic Sarah Records, recording two albums (*Snowball* and *For Keeps*), a mini-album (*Skywriting*) and seven singles and EPs. The Field Mice were a band in love with love. A pop group who never had hits, their songs clung to the hearts of those who found them – like the people we want closer but can't touch.

Trembling Blue Stars songs are much sadder songs.

Bob: "If they're sadder then that's worrying cos

there's a lot of me in them. Sometimes The Field Mice songs would be works of imagination. I could write a song like 'Kiss And Make Up' cos it's just a nice pop song title. And I quite like that song. But with Trembling Blue Stars, there was a lot... I think they're just better songs."

Formed with Bob's schoolfriend Michael Hiscock in suburban Mitcham in 1988, The Field Mice's early works were gloriously amateurish bedroom pop. Produced by the then unknown Ian Catt (the man who transformed Bob Stanley's encyclopaedic referencing and Sarah Cracknell's kittenish purr into chart magic with Saint Etienne), the 'Emma's House' demo – which became their first single – even with a broken toy drum machine and flu-ridden Wratten, is effervescent. Like crumpled love letters and blurred photographs breathed into life, these shy-eyed songs catalogued events, places, people and feelings caught in moments of exquisite vulnerability – the ache on the lips just before the first kiss, the favourite song of a departed lover, coach station reunions and farewells. Above everything, Wratten's songs brimmed with clear-eyed superhuman hope, even when hope itself appeared a redundant resource. Not scared. Prone to daydream. A little bit in love.

Beth: "They're just different."

Bob: "They're different. But musically I thought a lot of it was really strong. I was very happy with the variety, when you think it was all done in less than three years. And there's a lot of stuff... But I think you go from something like 'Fabulous Friend' to doing 'Triangle' and 'Humblebee' and..."

Beth: "Our favourite Field Mice songs are not friends. I like 'Kiss And Make Up' and 'Between Hello And Goodbye', and he likes absolute rubbish! Like 'Humblebee'! And we'll sit there and have a proper argument about which Field Mice songs are better. The ones he picks are just... wrong!"

Bob: "They're not!"

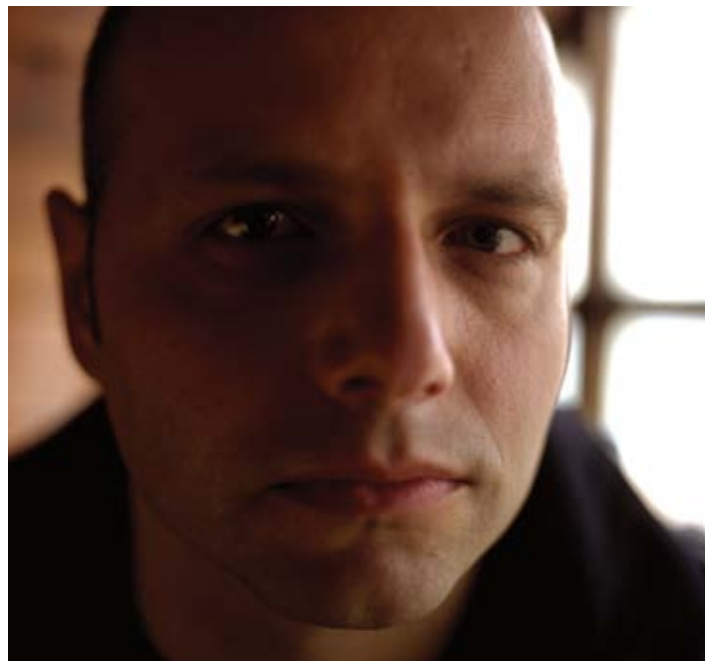
Beth: "They are!"

Bob: "A window into our world, we sit around arguing about The Field Mice! What sad people!"

In 1991, The Field Mice expanded with the addition of Anne Marie Davies, Harvey Williams and Mark Dobson. In so doing, they seemed to make real many of the themes in Bob's songs – friendships muddled by feelings that could only be expressed in the coded, piercing dialogue of song. Divided between the abstract art pop of *Skywriting* and the elegant, sensitive pop with which Sarah Records was more commonly associated, the new line-up ushered in the group's finest moment yet.

Bob: "We loved all sorts of music. We liked out-and-out pop music as much as the most experimental electronica. We never saw ourselves as an indie band. It was a shock for people to say, 'oh, this cutie band!' We were like, 'What?' If anything, we came from the whole Factory, New Order thing. The total opposite. We had raincoats, not anoraks!"

'Missing The Moon' was the final Field Mice EP, seven minutes long, gliding and revolving for a small eternity in a swirl of sunset synths. It's the closet cousin of New Order's 'The Perfect Kiss', sleek, modern and borne upwards on a conveyor belt of machines lest the utter permeating ache of humanity and fallibility cause it to crumble to the



songs

'Can you think of a song that *doesn't* contain I, you, we, or us?'

ground. Bobby sings almost entirely in sighs as he trades verses with Anne Marie, each gentle cadence of electric guitar underpinning the bold, understated chorus: "*I do... I do believe this love's to stay/I believe that Love shall remain*". It made you want to fall in love, just so you could fall in love against that backdrop of foreverness. It was a perfect kiss, and it will last forever.

Northern Picture Library was the next incarnation of Wratten and Davies' affair. When an onstage fracas sealed the fate of The Field Mice in December 1991, the couple retreated home to compose *Alaska*, an album of intimate, Eno-influenced, partly instrumental sketches.

Bob: "It was very much a studio thing. We did try and play live but we should never... it was much more ambient and experimental. That lasted until... you know!" [Laughs]

We do know.

Bob: "Until, er... erm... as long as me and Anne Marie lasted, really. So, um..."

Beth: "People ask me, 'doesn't it get on your nerves that he still writes songs about Anne Marie?' He fucking doesn't! It's *not* about Anne Marie! Jesus!"

And then? Trembling Blue Stars, *Her Handwriting* in 1996, and a head full of memories. 'Abba On The Jukebox' was the single and centrepiece of this classic break-up album. Over the course of seven minutes, a series of now-disconnected images are sadly filed away. "*A day of churches/And getting her hair cut... Her swinging on a tyre/Me taking a picture*." It's the softly descending comedown to the ecstasy rush of 'Missing The

Moon' and Wratten is candid about the album's source material, if slightly regretful for how this honesty has cast a shadow over his career. Sad, but shimmering with a desire to start afresh, *Her Handwriting*, like the best Trembling Blue Stars moments, is ultimately a life-affirming affair, one best listened to when in motion. It's like boarding a train to a new town, your head cleaned and charged with possibilities.

The next step was to form a new band, with floating contributions from Michael Hiscock, Harvey Williams... and guest vocalist Anne Marie Davies.

Bob: "The worst thing is that people do think of me as some sort of Anne Marie stalker. And that's really frustrating, because we're really good friends!

Beth: "Yeah, there was this review... Sub Pop said 'oh, you might not wanna read it.' They actually called us 'stalker pop'! Isn't that awful?"

Um. 'Simpere stalker pop'. I think that was in *Careless Talk Costs Lives*, actually.

Bob: "Oh well!"

Beth: And that album [that was reviewed] wasn't even about Anne Marie!"

With Davies' forlorn portrait emerging from the cover of follow-up album *Lips That Taste Of Tears*, and Bob's songwriting taking an increasingly downbeat slide into analysing the minutiae of dissolving relationships, peaking with 2001's masterfully bleak, Joy Division-gone-pop *Alive To Every Smile*, the connection seemed inevitable, if inaccurate. Unbearably sad songs like 'Ammunition' and 'Made For Each Other' unravel in slow-motion, weightless in texture and exposed in a zero-gravity

frieze where Wratten's words – unpretentious, uncomplicated and sung so softly that you daren't breathe as he intones – can be guiltily pored over.

Bob: "I guess everyone has their area that they're interested in. There's certain stuff that I'm interested in and that I would write about. The people change in the songs, but, to people outside, it can sound like the same thing over and over. I've got ideas for songs that are nothing to do with relationships. But there's fewer of those songs. I find the relationship songs easier. Just because..."

...falling in and out of love is the most dramatic, existential thing that can ever happen to you?

Bob: "It is. Y'know, that guy in the review the other day was saying that all our songs have got 'I', 'me', 'you', 'us' in it and I was thinking, 'but can you think of a song that doesn't?' It's very hard to write, unless it's just abstract poetry."

So are they the same group then, The Field Mice and Trembling Blue Stars?

Bob: "The Field Mice reissues are coming out, and it makes me really, really pleased with the new record. I'm really happy that this is the best record I've been involved with and that's the way it should be. And that's not to put down The Field Mice but it's almost like they're baby pictures or something? That's the past, and I don't wanna go back there. I can deal with The Field Mice in terms of the reissues, but that's all. That's why we would never reform!"

"When we were doing the reissues it felt like a different group, and something I was once involved with that is long gone. And it felt OK to listen to it, but it felt nice that it was over as well."



reduced euphoria

Words: **Jon Dale**

Illustration: **Jussi Brightmore**

Let **Losoul** put your house in order

The music of Losoul, aka Frankfurt-based producer and DJ Peter Kremeier, enacts a subtle reinterpretation of house music. Lost inside his finest productions – ‘Lies’, ‘Taste Not Waste’, his stellar remixes of Khan and Julee Cruise’s ‘Say Goodbye’ or Freaks’ ‘Turning Orange’ – the listener is enraptured, hypnotised by the pulse-steady, hyper-logical grids of Kremeier’s rhythms, blanketed by the warmth of swooping bass thumbprints, with rivulets of glassy, spine-tingle tones weaving a complex web of tactile tickle across the tundra of your willing skin. He’ll take a core motif from, say, Chicago house, simmer it down, capture its essence, and then fire it into his productions, injected into the body like a jet stream of opiates. Everything feels, but there’s never too much: this is house music at its most *reduced*, each glimmer of texturology slipstreamed to its most crucial. It’s molecularised, but wreaks pleasure through your entire sensorium.

Losoul’s first single ‘Open Door’ was, in Kremeier’s own words, “a very euphoric example of simple but soulful house”, but subsequent releases internalised that euphoria, replacing emotional explosion with glowering force.

“The following releases have a similar intensity but do not try to push that much,” he says. “They are a bit more calm but maybe even deeper than the debut... My first album, *Belong*, is perhaps the height of this development. Its tracks are more reduced in their mood.”

But even *Belong* understood the joy of pure play: one of its peak tracks, ‘Overland’, stole the riff and the shuffle from Michael Jackson’s ‘Billie Jean’ and set it in pressurised environments, scrawling over it with light-headed refrains.

Kremeier’s basic impact detours his recordings away from prissy minimalism. His most recent album, *Getting Even* (Playhouse, 2004), opens as it means to go on: ‘Railrude’ fires out a house thump, like machinated tennis balls, but it’s the sweeping, woozy bass that propels the track, catching your body in its upswing, destabilising the air around you. Other tracks on the album grab the bass thrust and squeeze it into 303 forms, scrawling in the air, the faecal blurt of the acid bassline ploughing through and around Kremeier’s rhythms like the silver trail of a speeding snail. He explains, not altogether clearly, “This acid phase was a part of our musical recognition. Some people do not accept it. It can be uplifting – it may hurt. But there’s no real ‘acid’ track on *Getting Even* and there never was to be one. Some sounds

and moods recall it though – and this relates to a stronger thread.”

That ‘stronger thread’ weaves all around *Getting Even*. It’s music that, to paraphrase one of Kremeier’s own song titles, ‘remembers its history.’ You can hear Chicago house in here, the burn of acid, the sheen and shine of Detroit techno’s surfaces, and the downtime, blue hues of minimal house. You can also hear some of the emotional uplift and intensity of soul music, but burnished, buffered down to a slightly gritted surface. Kremeier says: “I like soul a lot and have quite a fine collection of classics. But there’s also something else. Soul is not just all about James Brown or Marvin Gaye. It’s about what you can bring of yourself and relate with somebody else listening or dancing. It’s utopian.”

The ultimate pleasure of Losoul’s music? It’s the way Kremeier realigns supposedly exclusive elements with one another. Classic discourse around house music posits one form of emotional excess, the rapturous overflow of expression in song-based and/or diva house, against its opposite, the ever-changing same of the ‘track’. In one instance house absorbs you into its emotional orbit, and in the other it streamlines your own psycho-physical responses: music as a plateau traversed by the body. Losoul’s music appreciates both angles without cleaving absolutely to either. Although it is fair to say that Kremeier is nowhere near ‘song-ful house’, the trackier

elements of his productions aren’t steely and unrelenting. Yet his music avoids the mushiness of the middle ground. It’s reduced and somewhat melancholy, but endlessly functional. As Kremeier observes: “It might seem forced or pushy sometimes, which is great on the dancefloor. But as soon as you get more into music, you expect

It’s music that remembers its history

other shades, too. This has also to do with reaching higher distances away from the floor without losing contact with it. Does this sound abstract? OK, we are talking about an album: *Getting Even*. We wanted it to be a soundtrack for both the floor and also away-from-the-club situations. I never tried to separate those situations too much, so there may seem to be fewer extremes.”

But, he adds, “without melancholy, there will be no joy again. See?”

Further listening: five minimal masterworks

Melchior Productions The Meaning (Playhouse, 2004)

Thomas Melchior takes classic house motifs and distils them to their most potent and punctual. While his methods are borderline stentorian, his productions emit a cool grace while intimating the heat of house’s sensuality. Physically compulsive, even at its most evacuated.

Baby Ford Basking In The Brakelights (Force Inc/Perlon, 2004)

Sometimes collaborating with Melchior as Soul Capsule, Baby Ford has weathered 15 years of aesthetic polygamy and come out with an absolutely essential take on house: some of the most minimal work from the field. Sketched in chiaroscuro, the

springy steps of ‘Cold Sweat’ – full of pinprick, fine-tooth-comb incidentals – supply the highlight.

Ricardo Villalobos Thé Au Harem d’Archimède (Perlon, 2004)

Included for the impossibly gorgeous opening cut ‘Hireklon’, where handclaps are vacuum-packed and placed in abstruse configurations, rhythm-grids are beaten out on strange, alien instrumentation, and midway through a classical guitar fires 20th Century classical illogic into the slipstream. Truly odd, and completely compelling.

Benny Blanco
‘Put Your Hands’ (Playhouse, 2004)
A textbook example in how to get it absolutely right, ‘Put Your Hands’

is from Blanco’s album *8 Ft in the Air*. He leaves a melancholy, distant female vocal (swooning “put your hands together one time”) out to drift on flecks of guitar, light-burst sweeps of sound, and finger-trip chords that flick the switch on one of 2004’s most lustrous songs.

Mathew Jonson ‘Typerope/Magic through Music’ (Itiswhatitis, 2003)

One of the sovereign twelves of the past few years, and documenting Johnson at an early peak, ‘Typerope’ sounds a little like Isolée in a zero-gravity chamber. ‘Magic through Music’ is particularly weightless and totally ‘Europe Endless’ in design as treble-tremble sounds shuttle out of a centrifugal motif like spittle-spray. Just gorgeous.



live

strikes twice

Words: David McNamee

Photography: Cat Stevens

Lightning Bolt/Trencher
Enigma, Brighton
Lightning Bolt/Wolf Eyes/
Jackie-O Motherfucker/Growing
Electric Ballroom, London

A local minor improv-noise celebrity, grinning like a twat, grabs me by the hair with one hand and twists my fist skywards into a devil-sign with the other. We're getting closer to it now.

"It's great to see a fucking HEAVY METAL band finally playing Brighton," Matt Raised By Wolves ejaculates prior to art-rock natives Trencher screaming the crap out of their rubbish record collections. He's talking about Lightning Bolt. Isn't everyone?

He's hugging me and dancing and throwing devil-signs. Minutes before, I was wading, (right word, wrong crowd) transfixed, through a moshpit from another galaxy. Enigma's floor was actually *rippling* – it was like standing on waves of jelly. People all around me were hurling themselves into each other but, at the gentlest flexing of fingertips, bodies would recoil, bouncing away like protons. The music – just bass and drums – wasn't heavy at all. It was light like mercury, like Neu! with jetpacks. All treble, all through a bass amp set up on the floor but scanning in heatwaves across the tops of our heads. Everyone was surging, clustering towards something emitting from the corner

of the room. We never saw it for the bodies, any of these things could have been there: a grail, a 'weirding module' from *Dune*, "a door opening up with all these elves running out" (Brian Chippendale, in *Plan B* issue zero). What was there: Brians Gibson and Chippendale; a mask and a Santa hat.

It was the most surreal thing, dreamlike. Someone was having an out-of-body experience here, but was it me or the two musicians or the music itself? One element had got redirected in a two-way transmission, got zapped into other matter, got lost – and it wasn't just the guitar, the vocals, or the songs. If we can get close enough to see what's happening down there, then maybe we'll know its name and we can command it. For this one brief moment, the Lightning Bolt experience is genuinely unlike anything else I've felt.

I have to say this now, because ultimately, as a live band, Lightning Bolt are tedious as shit.

Sunn 0))) named one piece of post-metal majesty 'FWTBT (I Dream Of Lars Ulrich Being Thrown From The Bus Window Instead Of My Master Mystikall Kliff Burton)'. It was a eulogy for Metallica's pre-whore-out space-cadet hippy bassist Cliff Burton, contributor to the first three Metallica albums (the only Metallica genuinely worth a listen)

and fondly remembered as 'the soul' of the band. Burton was killed in a tourbus accident shortly after swapping bunks with Metallica C(unt)EO Lars Ulrich – forever sealing the band's gruesome legacy as the Bon Jovi In Black. Embedded in side one of Metallica's ferocious, juvenile, skin-ripping 1983 debut *Kill 'Em All* – in the crack between cod-HM single 'Jump In The Fire' and anthem for utter no-tomorrow teenage immersion in heavy metal, 'Whiplash' – is Cliff's 'Anesthesia (Pulling Teeth)'.

'Anesthesia' ripples crudely out of Burton's amp, tentatively glitching and bending around massively distorted bass frequencies like a newly-formed mouth trying out a new language. It sounds utterly alien to the Metallica of 'St Anger', or even 'Creeping Death'. Cliff's bass burps and burns its notes, yowling when it hits a sore nerve, then soothing with washes of acid and electric. 'Anesthesia' sounds like it actually *is* pulling teeth, just to see if it can make better noises without them.

By the time Ulrich's (we presume it's Ulrich, the weasel-eyed shit, although Burton has been the only member credited to the piece) drums crash in, it's found its tongue and how to use it – a lolling, licking, *Little Shop Of Horrors* Thing slurping up sparks and leaving slime trails over the speakers. It sounds hungry, enthusiastic and completely



innocent, light years away from the one-note (palm-muted open E distorted till your molars dissolve and trilled as fast as you can masturbate) kill-the-you-your-parents-made angst of Hetfield.

With each live reading it grew new heads, and each improvised scratch, slide and growl now sounds perfectly placed. It's a wonder that it was ever recorded, let alone released, in the first place.

Maybe it's metal the way that babies hear it in the womb, maybe it was the Deadhead acid in Burton's brain causing his fingers to accelerate and decelerate and warp through the strange funk you can sometimes hear burbling away under the sheet metal guitar in very early Metallica. As the garagey, teenage 4/4 drums clatter away, 'Anesthesia' rides a weird corrosive funk, twisting around itself and gathering momentum with each lash of tongue and gash of electric. Abstract, noisy, naïve, imbued with increasing liquid energy, it is also oddly comforting and, crucially, *not angry*.

At the end, as the whole thing stutters to its climax, we hear something shifting between the noise patterns laced through heavy metal and the something more primal and unfocused that we sometimes feel sloshing around the back of our brain when we respond to an element in music that makes us

desperate for a sensation hinted at but as yet unformulated.

Just before the staccato intro of 'Whiplash' stabs in, you hear something give birth to Lightning Bolt.

Lightning Bolt are *boring*. In moments, convincingly, they're like every thought you ever had, sped up into equations where density and mass are blasted into infinite particles. 'Assassins', both live and on record, is such a thing. It sounds like heavy metal played by computers. Programmed on a Spectrum 48k with only enough memory to incorporate the thrash algorithms for 'velocity' and 'riff', It sounds like it's speeding ahead of you. Lightning Bolt are fast like sharks and their live gigs are a duel between band and audience, the ultimate endurance test. Who will burn out first? Can two men and a bass amp take on a whole crowd of hype-sold, noise-fucked ex-metal fans?

At Enigma, I lose. But at the Electric Ballroom, I simply opt out, the first gig I've ever walked out of through sheer boredom (and this was someone who stayed through the pretentious muso mewling shite of Jackie-O Motherfucker and Growing). I win by forfeit, by calling their bluff.

Lightning Bolt explore and exploit the most exciting and least talked about DNA strand of the Load Records

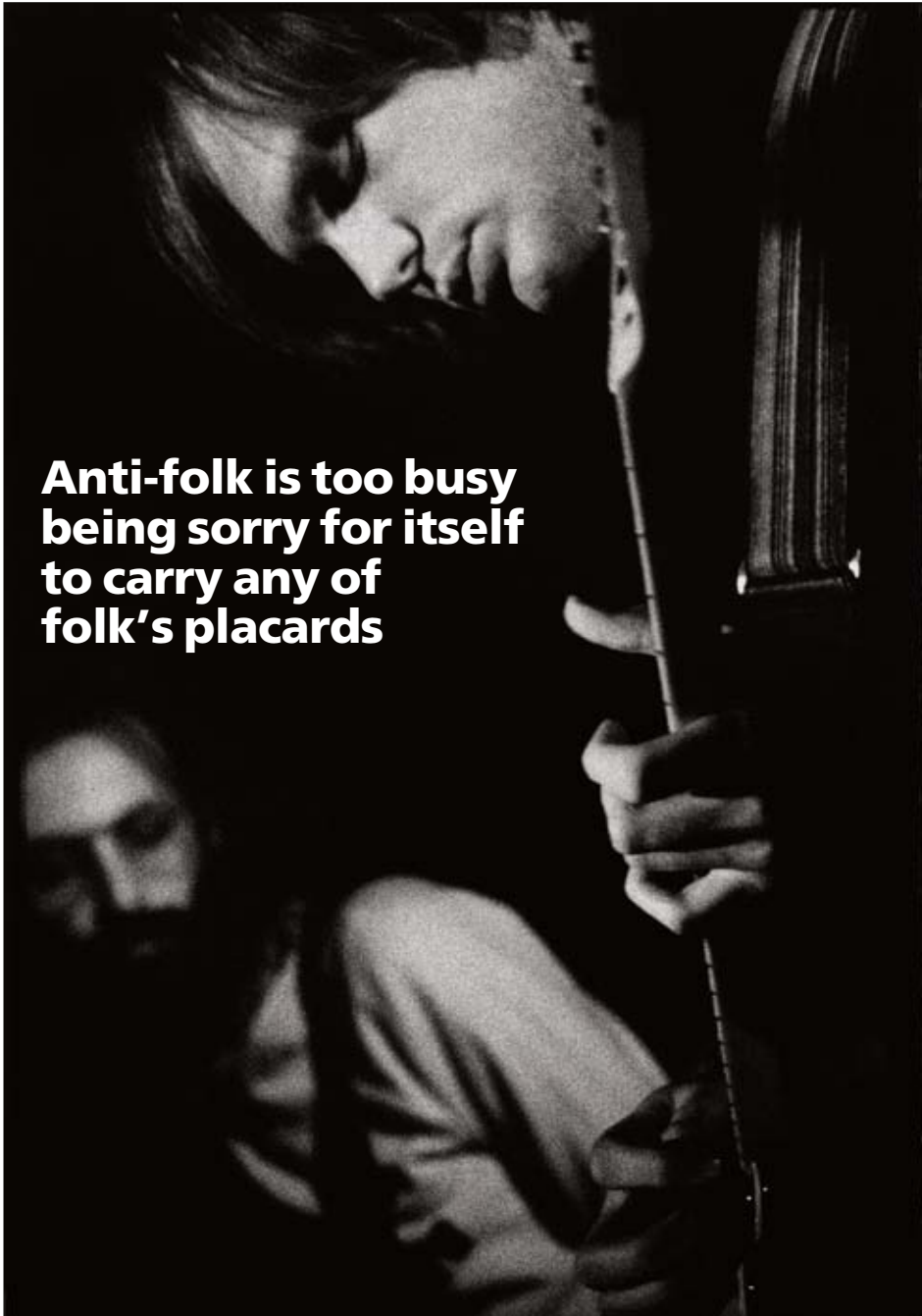
phenomenon – the unique attention to *colour* in noise. Theirs is a garish, *horrible*, clashing palette that a synaesthiac would interpret as Sinclair Spectrums loading, or Teletext pages crashing, or security cameras decoding inaccurately into clashes of neon pinks and greens that break your brain.

Wading, transfixed, through a moshpit from another galaxy

But without an anchoring agenda, their music's own relentlessness becomes its own worst enemy.

If I want to feel my self broken by sound then I will be broken by the malevolent triangles of Wolf Eyes. A noise that, when you turn your back on it, you can feel breathing hot and heavy on the back of your neck: always close. It's like the ghosts of every embarrassing bad goth night at the Electric Ballroom – swirling around the room *Last Crusade*-style – got REALLY FUCKING ANGRY.

Wolf Eyes ARE heavy metal – every ugly, nasty, abrasive, uncool aspect of it, without a single note of its (or any) music. But that's a whole other two-page live review.



Anti-folk is too busy being sorry for itself to carry any of folk's placards

the shamblers' association

Words: **Pil and Galia Kollektiv**

Photography: **Sarah Bowles**

**Herman Düne/St Thomas/Comet Gain
The Track And Field Winter Sprinter
@ Water Rats, London**

Disappointment is such an integral part of the alt country ethos that we kind of anticipated the cancellation of fantastic Swedish punk-pop quintet Love Is All. Fifth on the bill and hardly noticeable to the shy indie kids, their scrappy, cool new wave anthems, reminiscent of Kleenex and X-Ray Spex's greatest moments, were sadly missed by us alone. Comet Gain, on such shambolically bad form it was hard to believe they've been going for over a decade now, were hardly any compensation, nor was the replacement of The Projects by Norse folksters St Thomas. So it was only appropriate when a sweet, weird voice, once described by *The Guardian* as "rough and ready for life to disappoint him", started singing about lost opportunities and unfulfilled promises. Folk music originally spoke of social unrest; it suggested a solidarity unimaginable in the 'me me me' generation. Anti-folk, its slacker cousin, is too busy being sorry for itself to carry any placards. This means that, beyond the witticisms, which are only funny for so long, it requires a fair amount of commitment on the listener's part for anti-folk to become more engaging than a random blog. You have to care about these people's problems or you begin to question their right to dump them on you. For the first half of the show, and despite the obvious support of their loyal fans, Herman Düne risk losing us for exactly this reason. As the charm of their wry wit wore thin, it became increasingly less rewarding to following Andre and David's now transatlantic relationship/trouble with girls' thoughts about the weather. But, just when you thought it was over, the band realised that all the cancellations had left them time to kill, and so they played on, winning us over.

"Somebody will have to tell us when to stop," David-Ivar Herman Düne announced apologetically. But, as an invisible hand switched the dial on the old amp onstage from alt country to funky-folk, with Turner Cody's Lou Reed-beginning-to-see-the-light guitar thrown into the mix, the songs kept flowing from the heart, outweighing earlier family tensions, and no one seemed to want to say the word.

Breed

Lock 17, Camden

"We were and still are: Breed." Hard to believe it's been nearly a decade since their split. The band's brasher moments could teach Franz Ferdinand a thing or two about melodramatic new wave pop, and Simon Breed, impossibly tall and dressed like a geekier Elvis Costello, wrestles his guitar like a salty old swab fighting a shark, while Placebo drummer Steve Hewitt pounds a hypnotic rhythm. With the dirty swamp blues of 'Shakin' A Bone', Nick Cave is the most obvious parallel to these mournful laments. But it's the magic and menace of the sea that Breed recall most. They leave us drenched and shivering on the shore, hungry for another dip in their murky depths.

Tommy Mack

C.O.C.O.

Tractor Tavern, Seattle

C.O.C.O. are a two-piece from Olympia, WA. The boy Chris has big hair. He thumps the drums like Peg in The Gories. He's all rigorous clatter and loose, minimalist

panache. You may know him better as the bassist with Dub Narcotic Sound System; maybe not. He's fluid, yet taut; strips the beat down to its essential components but is continually inventive. Slipping back two decades, my feet are still in meltdown after a Trouble Funk concert. ESG? They sound overcooked next to this.

The girl Olivia struts; belts out the bluesy Seventies lick 'Supercool' just to prove she can; explores teasing bass riffs; switches instruments with Chris ('Out Of Time'); drips cool like a more controlled Corin Tucker; bustles; seduces; turns the entire notion of what dance music should be on its head.

Fill in the gaps yourself.

Everett True

The Constantines

The Lagerhouse, Detroit

In the shadow of the now defunct Detroit Tiger Stadium, on the pockmarked streets of the second most deadly city in the US, is where Toronto five-piece The Constantines first aired their newest battery of songs, along with a handful of guerrilla punk from

their two previous albums. Steeped far less in Springsteen and Fugazi live than on record, the Cons' version of humanist rock transcends the mechanized clockwork nonsense of so many of their danceable peers. I can't imagine hearing such wiry highs and supple lows from The Rapture, cut loose from Mama DFA's apron strings.

Highlights included the fire and brimstone gospel 'Young Offenders' and the restrained cacophony of 'Young Lions'. I'm kind of clueless about why the drunks were calling for 'Shine A Light' since there's nothing in the lyrics that's overly suggesting a drunkard's anthem, but they called for it all night long. The band even submitted to the unwritten Michigan requirement that they, as Canadians, pay homage to another Canuck band (Elevator To Hell's 'Why I Didn't Like August 93') as well as Talking Heads ('Thank You For Sending Me An Angel'). The debuted material was refreshingly complex, but comfortably worn in.

Closing with as close to a ballad as this band get, singer Bry Webb relinquished his guitar, standing still while his band shuffled

through a low key rhythm punctuated by moments of blinding noise. Perhaps not punk in delivery, but we all know ethos transcends music genre. Instead the Cons brought something oblique and beautiful to Detroit, displaying an empathy with our urban decrepitude far greater than the supposedly hardened garage bands who walk our streets on a daily basis.

Aaron Shaul

Dälek

Rothko, New York

And at the end of this mindblowing set, they were like, "thanks for coming out. We know you were only here for the free beer, but we understand, we would too." And I'm like, "You're DÄLEK! You RULE! This shouldn't be HAPPENING!"

Album launch parties, man. Free beer. It was still a beautiful home turf gig. No more the three tour-exhausted dudes in generic sweaty vests. Turns out that stylus-devouring DJ Still is quite the snappy hipster, scrubbing up nicely in a distressed designer jacket, while iMac-wielding Oktopus wears dot.com

danger! high voltageWords: **Nicola Meighan**Photography: **Mark Connelly****Motormark****Caledonian Backpackers, Edinburgh**

It's the guy in the gingham who dances the hardest. There he is, down the front, every inch the bank clerk arsed on three pints of Magners and the love of his mother, surrounded by cliques of incongruous others. There are raggy backpackers and vintage-vogue kohl-girls and rouge-adorned skinny boys flexing their collarbones.

But our tartan-clad dance-geek stands out from the crowd: check out this check-bedecked geek dude's dancing! Outstanding! See his spectacle-steaming, contorted whirl; see his jabbing, hammering android convulsions; see his searing, soaring angular spasms: like a virgin arse fucked by a high-voltage cattle prod.

See Motormark – for it is they. They are two and they are vital: glossy analogue anarchists and arch aural terrorists who're responsible for this grotesque, compelling transformation from call-centre nerdbwoy to riveting wunder wiz. He is agog.

And he's not alone: we're unified in wide-eyed wonder at the fitful, infernal fruition before us.

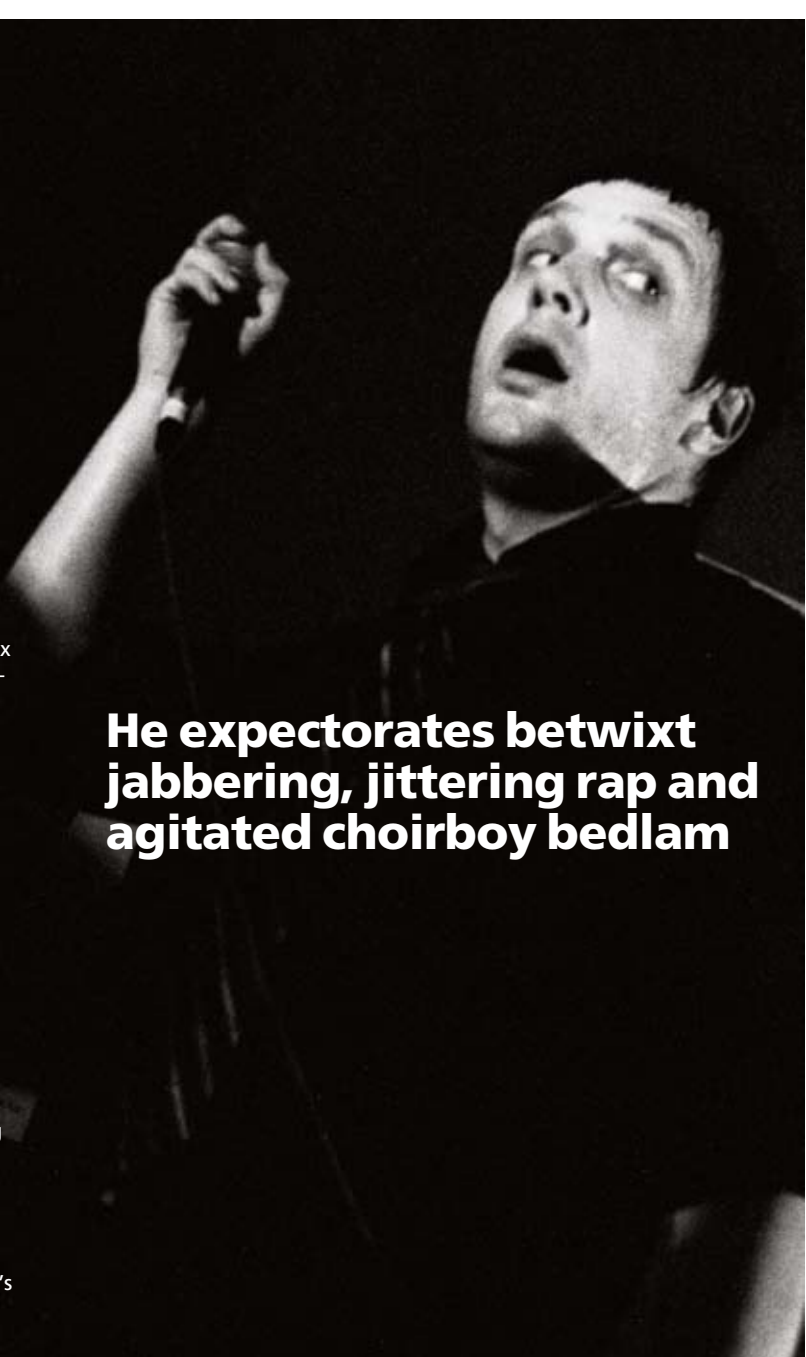
To the right – Jane Mоторo, deliriously appearing thus: toy-box tutu; vacuum leather; crown of peroxide, Hollywood pout; come-hither fishnets and exquisite sonic clout. Mоторo ejects pitch-piercing, hair-raising vocals; caresses and charms a wizard synth and struts like a brooding, menacing mistress. "This is art and it's a dirty business," she tunelessly pukes, as the world implodes for Casio-core and we fall at her patent, spike-heeled feet.

And to the left – that's Marko PoloRoid: eyes like a criminal, voice like a killer queen. He expectorates betwixt jabbering, jittering rap and agitated choirboy bedlam in the blink of a mascara-defiled proverbial. He's bandaged rigid in black – hair, eyes, nails, clothes, discourse, heart – and judders like a frenzied robot; wields a twisted guitar as one might an acid bath. He falls to his knees; eyeballs the photographer; entranced in a raw-boned, bedeviled hysteria.

Motormark are spellbinding: blinding, skin-tight hyperactive disco Pixies, whose barbed acid-techno and fuzz-burning feedback informs a divine line in electro-punk alcopop. And tonight, onstage, they're on course for hyperspace.

So Jane is screaming, frantically tugging the mic cable; reeling it round and round her throat – pulling ever tighter, whitening – hollering. And Marko is spasmodic, intravenously rigged to his hand-held digi-box, eyes lolling, crushing its heady beats for a fix. And our plaid-panache dancer collapses in fatigue; crumples, spiraling, ravaged, spent. Even the Marshall amp's keeled over, deranged and shattered by the art-house racket and Motormark's raucous, riotous carnage. We've all been greatly damaged.

Death by electro? Consider it done.



He expectorates betwixt jabbering, jittering rap and agitated choirboy bedlam

yuppie chinos, bless his cotton shirt. Scary rapper Dälek still looks like a giant cartoon cranberry in an oversized T-shirt with bumpy white trainers poking out the bottom...

In an ideal world, we'd take it as read that Dälek's visionary post-industrial hip hop destroyed all, and continue discussing their fashion sense. But ridiculous London billings with Tomy Nightlight progsters 90 Day Men, and the overwhelming indifference of this (mostly) motionless crowd of beer-hungry New York hipsters have taught me different.

So imagine this. It's the end of the world and you've scored a bouncy castle. Imagine three hours on that bouncy castle, flushed and breathless and ready to puke, compressed into one locomotive second of nausea and energy and compulsion to move. Every second of a Dälek gig is a second such as this; life roaring into your body, even as you suspect that the end is nigh.

I felt Still's lungs exhale as he blew across the stylus, a silent breath become defiant new noise. I jumped so hard that the floor vibrated, joyful stompiness somehow inspired by the bleak dystopic sentence of

Oktopus' dark, heavy and apparently desperate music (though the truth is that nothing which makes you dance this hard will ever give way to despair). And the man with the thousand yard stare, eyes flashing white as he rolled them skyward, clutched his arms around his rocking, praying body, shaking his head in histrionic dismay. These people are Jedi. They deserve your respect. And New York owes them a goddamn beer.

Gracelette

Isis/These Arms Are Snakes/ Dysrhythmia Cat's Cradle, Carrboro

Isis was the headliner, enjoying, as they are, their cultural moment: no less an organ than *The New York Times* had reviewed their Bowery Ballroom show just a week earlier. These Arms Are Snakes, too, were lofted into town atop a foaming crest of buzz. And both bands were fine, in their way. But the night belonged to Dysrhythmia.

"Who the fuck?" you might well ask. "Three guys from God knows where," I would have to reply, since I am not getting

paid to do research. What's true is what's observable: they're a trio; they've got long hair; both bassist and guitarist had microphones before them, though their songs were all instrumentals. And they shredded, magnificently and mathematically and undeniably. In so doing, they pointed out just what's being missed by many of metal's recent converts: that metal isn't about being as emo as you can be. It isn't about 'feeling it'. It isn't about being 'extreme', however else press kits may bleat. The point – the whole point – is to shred. If Satan or sarcophagi or sarcoma are what enable a band to get their shred working, then on with it; but no interest in the history of drone, or in new levels of volume, can bring shred to a band who lacks the will. The shred must come first. It is no respecter of place or pedigree. Unlike angst, it cannot be feigned.

And thus it was that a practically unbilled trio of guys dressed in loose-fitting unwashed T-shirts flexed uncountable time signatures through no fewer than five changes per song for about 30 minutes, said "thanks", and retreated to the quiet solitude

of their merchandising table. They were impossibly good; they made the evening worthwhile. I drank several beers. It was the best set I'd seen in months.

John Darnielle**Ladyfuzz****Camden Barfly, London**

Who'd have thought the New Cross garage rock scene could produce something so interesting, so joyful? Ladyfuzz are a very British, very skilful Franz Ferdinand-style drummer and guitarist with tucked-in shirts, fronted by a very European, very crazy Bjork-style singer in a party dress. The combination works perfectly. Berlin singer Liz is allegedly Bloc Party's muse while guitarist Ben was stolen from another band, the remnants of whom are here tonight complete with bitter heckles. The band laugh and jerk multilingually. They shout political-sounding statements about "BLACK" and "WHITE". And they encore with single 'O Marie' to a converted audience. Ladyfuzz look like the future should.

Amy Liptrot

Her mouth curls round the Rs in a Nashville-meets-Norway brogue



taking the waters

Words: **Sophie Heawood**
Photography: **Mike Whelan**

Susanna And The Magical Orchestra **The Spitz, London**

When you stand shivering, beside a cold sea, waiting to take the plunge, it's hard to believe how much warmer it will be once you're in the water. And so it is with performance – the fear itself is more painful than the mistake you're afraid of making, as is proven by Susanna tonight. Her blonde hair is tied strictly back, as if held by an invisible hand, forcing this cruel exposure of her face. Morten, her one-man orchestra, stands conscientiously behind an assortment of keyboards and a European moustache. "This is going to be a very quiet set," he announces earnestly, but it's going to take more than interesting facial hair to make tonight's drunk punters shush.

Because somehow this gentle duo from Kongsberg, Norway, purveyors of soul-searching song with the most discreet and thoughtful of electronic accompaniments, have ended up playing the tail-end of a London jazz festival full of rugger buggers and boozed-up suits. As they launch into 'Hello', from their 2004 debut *Lists Of Lights And Buoys* (Rune Grammofon), the chatter continues, and you worry that Susanna won't be able to pull off the singing with that level of fragility. Fortunately, her voice is a whole lot stronger than her face – but Morten's not having any of it.

"Sorry, I can't hear myself play," he announces. The chatter reduces. They start again, Susanna singing, "*Who are you to touch me in this very special way?*" Who indeed, as the inappropriate crowd continue being loud and drunk. "*Where are all these people coming from, where do all these accidents belong, why is all this happening to me?*" she asks, in a later song.

And yet the music really is magical, coming from a place of languor but not lassitude, with a rich and fertile energy in the slowness. Sometimes the lyrics fall into vague platitudes about loving and living, failing to do justice to the delicious voice that is giving them life. "*I touched you in the morning, our kisses deep and warm,*" she lulls, and it's then I realise that Susanna has gleaned her trade from the ladies of Tennessee, as her mouth curls round the Rs and spans out the As in a Nashville-meets-Norway brogue.

See, I used to think it was quirky that Susanna covered Dolly Parton's 'Jolene', given the modesty of the former woman and the bravado of the latter, but tonight it makes sense, and the rendition is a joy to behold, especially the bit where Susanna gets the lyrics wrong and has to start again.

Because only then, with her fear made carnate, can she relax and move on. She's been waiting for this to happen all night, and now it's done she can progress to a poignant finale, covering Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah'. Come on in, Susanna and your Magical Orchestra, the water's lovely.

Photography: **Owen Richards**



Richard H Kirk **Cube Microplex, Bristol**

Living legends are always awkward. Don't come much more awkward than Richard H Kirk, slinking on stage looking like the trainspotter uncle your mum always worries about, carrying a special plastic bag containing whatever techno-jiggerypokery he requires to summon his noise. Or perhaps they're just cellophane-wrapped sandwiches. It's difficult to tell.

Strange man. Strange gig. The Cube is a cinema, with a fully seated amphitheatre. So this audience sit in rows of ragged seats while Kirk bombards them with the deafeningly loud isolationist techno he's been crafting since Cabaret Voltaire. It still sounds like something designed to be played behind a hard-cut montage of nuclear missiles launching. But paranoia is his stock in trade and business is booming nowadays. Not that the clichés don't distract – from the second you realise there's a wall projector, you can bet on the appearance of 9-11 footage – but with a crowd forced to sit instead of twitch/dance/stand, what comes to mind is metal storage containers in Iraq where the US Army bombard prisoners with blistering volumes of noise. Except we've paid for it, and kinda dig it.

Kieron Gillen

The Long Blondes **Reclaim The Venue, London**

Shrouded in the mists of the South London fog, the dark contours of the old Venue ascend like a grotesque, burned-down temple of doom from the early evening traffic of New Cross Road. Most nights, there'd be a desperate queue of spaghetti-strapped, cider-drinking girls outside, waiting to be enveloped by the shrill tones of a Wham! tribute night. Rumours of The Venue's past glory as Eighties punk Mecca have reached our ears, but have been hard to believe.

But tonight we sneak through a back door to experience one of the defining moments of the emerging (and somewhat unfounded) New Cross scene. The Long Blondes, its leading ladies (and lads), are from Sheffield and have nothing to do with the local art student contingency. But they have been warmly adopted by Angular Records, who are launching their new single tonight. Live, they are far sweeter and less angular than their previous releases have suggested, with echoing Spectroesque backing vocals shining through the guitar stutters. They lose points for not including 'Autonomy Boy', but by the time they get to new song 'Christmas Is Cancelled', the venue is so full of festive spirit that few share their sentiments.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv

Luna **ULU, London**

Feels like I'm waving goodbye to an apparition. I'm standing here drinking chalky-white tap water. I'm marvelling once more at how such simplicity and straightforwardness can generate such unexpected magic. A wild, bewitching quality seeps out from behind these simply-constructed songs with their wayward lyrical quirks and smoky singing and extended

guitar jaunts that send charges of electricity through this gloomy hall without doing anything outlandish. It's this ghostly magic that's made Luna so intriguing these past 14 years, despite the Velvets/Television debts and moments of whimsy. Theirs is an apparently flat surface that sets off a million sparks, from a disarming rendering of 'Pup Tent' to the mesmerising guitar coda of '23 Minutes in Brussels'. For a band on the cusp of disappearing (one month from now they'll be an ex-band), the New York quartet sound eerily alive.

Hecklers vent anger at Luna for breaking up. Pallid-faced lead singer Dean Wareham waves goodbye with the self-conscious uprightness of a convicted criminal asserting his own innocence. A transcendent cover of Beat Happening's (tragic, beautiful) 'Indian Summer' is a fitting note on which to end. Luna are drinking the cloudy water too, I notice. Here's to farewells.

Robin Wilks

Maximo Park **ULU, London**

With his Bryan Ferry side parting (elaborately adjusted after every song), and an approach to tailoring best described as 'Neil Hannon auditions for *Withnail And I*', Maximo Park frontman Pual Smith is snotty aloofness personified. And everyone's fantasising about pummelling him with a cricket bat.

But drowning the knuckle-cracking is his band's three-minute hurricanes of ratatat rock, each encrusted with a diamond chorus, wherein Smith hollers his oddball tales of pub love and emotional death, stopping to read his journal mid-song. He's Morrissey minus the wrinkles; Nick Cave with a permanent smirk; Ian Curtis in a school tie. Moreover, because we so love to hate him, he's also the Wolf Gladiator of the indie pop universe.

Jamie Fullerton

I swear I feel tears well in my eyes, and I swear I'm not alone



we are not worthy

Words: **Alistair Fitchett**

Photography: **Alistair Fitchett**

Television Personalities

Chickfactor Festival, Bush Hall, London

The first Television Personalities song I ever heard was a live version of 'A Picture Of Dorian Gray' on a Creation label flexi disc. Twenty years on, it's the last song in their 'comeback' set

The word is that Daniel Treacy and his new group are recording new material and that it sounds wonderful. Certainly there are many old indiepop mafia faces in the crowd and a buzz of awkward anticipation in the air. The anticipation is largely rewarded as the band open with a great cover of 'Rock And Roll'. It's impossibly poignant

to hear Daniel sing, "My life was saved by rock and roll", and, if you don't know why, then may I suggest you go and do some homework. Old songs and new rub shoulders, and Daniel frequently tosses the set list aside, preferring instead to lead his new troupe in a wild-eyed journey through a land of magnificently special and naturally strange improvised Pop. In the blink of an eye, it switches from impossibly pure and heartbreakingly tender to biting and vitriolic. And, once again, if you don't understand how utterly essential that is, then go and do some homework.

Then, while poised on the edge of a peculiar, awkward perfection, Daniel short-circuits himself. It's like the time he infamously (and gleefully) slowed his songs to a dirge when presented with a support slot to Nirvana (at Kurt's request).

Tonight he saunters on for an encore that unleashes a deranged medley of songs, including a rampantly discordant and wilfully wild 'I Know Where Syd Barrett Lives' before climaxing in a rambling, fractured cover of 'My Generation'.

This cover goes to the heart of having the nerve to not compete. You could argue that, post-punk, generations of (indie)Pop protagonists failed to understand this impulse, which seems hardwired into Daniel Treacy's soul. And while it may not make life easy, it makes for one of the greatest Pop mythologies you could care to imagine.

In a new song, Daniel and his chanteuse intone "You don't deserve us". It's a wildly emotional moment. I swear I feel tears well in my eyes, and I swear I'm not alone. "You don't deserve us, you don't deserve us." And we don't.

Midnight Movies

The Vale, Glasgow

Maybe it's the setting: a knife-flickeringly scary pub across from Queen Street Station. Upstairs is a dingy theatre, the stage climbing three feet up from the floor. It's a room of peculiar earthiness verging on the sepulchral. And so are Midnight Movies.

I want the LA star system incarnate. I want glamour to atrophy before my eyes, images of Cary Grant and Jimmy Stewart attesting to something beyond reach. If I can feel that last gasp epic gesture made flesh, then wonder may still have a role.

Yet it's a band, not a movie, which does it. Midnight Movies retain that sense of being a fucking rock band, but their idea of it is formed more by Nico's death under the sun of Ibiza than any faux fall from grace. Tonight, this LA trio build upon the pace, tempo and patterning of their self-titled debut till a song like 'Persimmon Tree' reeks of the past nudging forward; the subversive female fury of the voice behind the drums revealing them as Stereolab conducted by Billy Wilder.

I don't get atrophying glamour tonight. But I do witness a star on the rise. Coming from Hollywood, it's much the same thing. **Stewart Gardiner**

Panda Bear/Signer/Alexander Tucker/Blood Stereo

Carpark/Pawtracks Showcase @ The Spitz, London

It was supposed to be an evening of slightly out of range transmissions from New Weird America courtesy of Ariel Pink and **Panda Bear**. I even wore my favourite T-shirt with bunny rabbits on. But my blissful state was somewhat punctured by news that most of Ariel Pink failed to get through immigration.

The bleak noise of **Blood Stereo** didn't help, making a buzzsaw death in Solihull seem cheery by comparison. No bunnies, no melodies. Detuned radios? Yes, but not such that any humanity could be detected. They at least managed to keep the audience noise at bay, which can't be said for **Alexander Tucker**. Playing blues licks through a delay pedal until they droned, his set was hampered by the noisy east London crowd.

At first, it seemed that **Signer** would suffer the same fate. Initially inaudible, they made a strummy sort of indie with impossibly quiet vocals, adding tinny laptop beats and finishing the strangely unfocused set with a fuck-off grunge track. It was like watching your mates' second ever band practice.

But then a bumfluffed dude with only his voice and a sampler took the stage and took the place captive. Shaking off the monastic feel of his recent *Young Prayer*, Panda Bear's music sparkled – layers of acoustic guitar, lazy beats and beautiful, interlacing vocals meshed into a cohesive whole. For once, it was the Panda that saved the people.

Natalie Moore

Part Chimp/Errors/James Orr Complex Nice 'N' Sleazys, Glasgow

Here's a trio of treats from the Rock Action stable, where no two records sound alike.

Moonlighting from local heroes Eska, it's not the hushed temperature of songs like 'A Million Men', but the sheer gobsmackery of Chris Mack's complicated guitar picking

that makes Nick Drake comparisons seem so apt for his solo project, **James Orr Complex**. Like John Fahey, he sounds at times like he's dancing with the ghosts of folk's past, and this is definitely a good thing.

I wanna dance to **Errors**. I wanna dance with Errors. I want to place them in the middle of the floor and dance around them. A Glaswegian trio of skinny gadget-freaks whose haircuts actually have mathematical specifications, their young selves are realising the electropop dream shared by all good teenage slaves to the beat. Could dancefloor fillers like 'Best Nose in Paris' soon be the soundtrack to degree shows across the world? Hopefully.

I fear for the future of my ears. Never mind my ears, my neck still won't hold my head up. **Part Chimp** will do that to you. The London-based quartet play monster rock, the heaviest metal, all the clichés without the clichés, as they juggernaut through choice cuts from their *Chart Pimp* debut. Air guitar playing is witnessed. Hey Nigel? These amps go to 12, you fuck. **George Taylor**

The bare bones of his songs are more succulent than many writers' fleshed-out efforts



Jack Rose/Glenn Jones

Upstairs At The Garage, London

"YOU LIMEY NO TEETH MOTHERFUCKERS. C'MON, LET'S GO. RIGHT HERE."

Jack Rose is *big*. And now he's pissed off. The Islington masses were talking through Glenn Jones' set; the subtleties of the ex-Cul de Sac guitarist's fingerpickin' blues lost in a babble of Friday night high spirits.

For a few brief moments you could hear a pin drop. And that's the only atmosphere in which to see this man with beard and beaded brow hunched over his guitar, coaxing out every grace note, every raga-infused crescendo, every clatter of glass slide against copper and nickel, as if they might mean something more than just another night out.

I could try and write about how this collision of Fahey and Fateh Ali Khan is a rebuilding of the folk tradition. I could try and tell you that Jack Rose turns Western pop's obsession with Eastern modes on its head, stripping away the linear elements and reassembling them as elliptical, all-enveloping walls of sound, but it would

be pointless. Because sometimes music evades coherent description and all you can say is, "I saw this. I was there."

I saw this. I was there.

Daniel Trilling

Shellac/Electrelane

The Scala, London

Shellac hate their audience, and who can blame them? Their music attracts predominantly caveman types with the combined IQ of a pebble. Enter Electrelane, whose pervasive excellence does more for feminism than any of Kathleen Hanna's self-righteous preaching. Electrelane are the average Shellac fan's nightly wet dream – "girls with guitars who can actually play."

"Is this thing on?" asks a contemptuous Albini. "Can you hear me now?"

Cue Trainer drumming with unnerving zeal, Bob Weston's smiling façade masking disdain. "Kill him!" screams Albini as the chorus of 'Prayer To God' kicks in, avenging his cuckolded pride. I headbang gleefully with the worst of them. My enthusiasm is noted. Enthusiasm is different if you're a

hush now

Words: Frances May Morgan

Photography: Simon Fernandez

Plush

12 Bar Club, London

He's singing guide vocals, marking the chords on a chiming Gibson. Wordless lilt warm him up and take us down; sweet meetings of finger and metal make us crane our necks and open our ears, fill in the gaps that he leaves to our imagination. He's already so comfortable upon the tiny stage: a man with a guitar for hands and constant melody in his throat. But it's not the complacent comfort of the seasoned performer. In Plush's 10-year history, there have been few shows. This is the ease of the private musician, lost in his own, distinct world, who pulls out a guitar late at night and suddenly all shyness is gone.

Likewise, *Underfed*, the 'unfinished' demo of *Fed*, set up home in my living room without asking, and taught me all its harmonies. The record and its *Smile*-like story became so much its own self that it seemed not made by human hands: and I thought (heretically) that, actually, I could live without seeing Plush made flesh. That was then. Now I stand on tiptoe where I see a shock of dark curls and a sharp, pale face. Red shirt and patterned tie. Liam Hayes as Tim Buckley by way of *Godspell*. I move to the right so I can see his hands. This is where I stay, caught in the interplay of his tapering fingers on the fretboard. He seems lost in the quiet, joyful, absorption of the craftsman, rearranging his strange songs; a hybrid of rock, soul and country's 'classic' patterns and the rootless experimentalism of someone who's loved them so much that all he can do is run with them, spilling bits along the way. I'm reminded of Mark Hollis, circa Talk Talk's *Spirit Of Eden*. Sonically miles apart, both approach 'the song' in a slippery fashion. They carry songwriting's historical weight proudly, yet contain the fluid motions of musical minds way ahead of themselves.

"I'm going where the letters go that were never sent," he sings, voice gracefully tumbling. The bare bones of his songs are more succulent than many writers' most fleshed-out efforts, and breathing in their scent is almost narcotic; the cheap heart-flutter of the tremolo unbearably right. A bright stroke of guitar catapults us to attention. The volume increases. The languor and sorrow give way to soulful self-assurance. The lithe hands grow stronger, making little stops and stabs that leave prints, indelible.

"Is this too loud?" he asks. At home I play *Underfed* loud enough to carry through several rooms. Live, he's right: his songs need to be quiet enough for you to move towards, even when your way is blocked by men's backs, and all the moving is in your head. He launches into 'Born Together', unashamed of its obvious Seventies progressions and poignancy, as he has been with all his songs. It comes at me like a woozy, fiery, beautiful arrow. My heretical thoughts are crushed beneath my boot heel, and I close my eyes, undone.

woman; last night at Q And Not U my dancing was interpreted as "grouping up" to the lead singer. Tonight, I'm given concerned asides, as though my delicacy would shatter in this moshpit.

Beth Capper

The Tears

Heaven, London

Brett Anderson and Bernard Butler are sharing a stage for the first time in 10 years, and my inner 14-year-old Suede fan has reared her kohl-smudged face.

Sample lyrics? "Oooh, alone in my room" and "Your imperfections are so beautiful." Yeah, Brett can still whinge with the best of them, all unrequited sleaze, cheap drugs and wanking. And I'm sure Bernard's doing things with his guitar that would make me go funny if I could see the stage. Like a pilot episode from a marginally funny spin-off sitcom, this glam pop baby may be a *Frasier* or it may be the *Friends*-spawned hell that is *Joey*. It's still too early in the game to tell.

Leonie Cooper

Thomas Truax

Forest Café, Edinburgh

Hey you, in the cider-baptised pulpit, seducing Our Father with your fine line in lupine falsetto and wry rock. Your miner's torch strapped over one eye; your randy machinery chomping on soundbites; your luscious beat slut Sister Spinster, a bingo machine-come-lewd drumbox. You look like Elvis, you sound like a genius; your shanties like dragonflies dodging the thunder.

Yes, I mean you down by the lectern, howling at the half-moon, howling into a huge horn. Wavering over the altar, banjo in hand. You heavenly hillbilly: purveyor of burlesque prog-baroque.

You, stripper-vicar, balefully preaching "You've got to take off a little bit of clothing before you put on my 'back-beater'; and sometimes people forget that." You fasten a whirring appliance to your shoulders, roving the crowd like a raving evangelist: "Let's take it home to Jesus!"

Thomas Truax, there is no question.

You are stupendous.

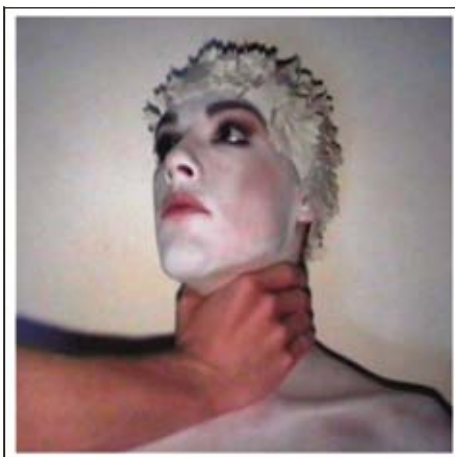
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Words: Frances May Morgan

Photography: Sarah Bowles



M Ward

Transistor Radio (Matador)

The transistor radio – best friend of The Shaggs (“*My companion is with me wherever I go/My companion is of course my radio*”), occult portal of The Beach Boys’ heavy-handed fairytale ‘Mount Vernon And Fairway’ – once embodied the lonely power of pop, the ear pressed against the tinny speaker in teenage

two-step. M Ward, it seems, has always known this need. It’s the root of all his music to date, and it reaches some kind of sweet, sashaying apotheosis on his fourth album – which begins, appropriately, with a contemplative instrumental cover of The Beach Boys’ ‘You Still Believe in Me’.

Music goes full circle all around us, see. It sure makes my world turn. And musicians like M Ward,

Parks achieved a similar loveliness and uncertainty on *Song Cycle*, injecting ragtime and vaudeville with tape delay and birdsong. But Ward wears his knowledge more lightly, wiping away any analytical frowns with the clean swoop of a slide on a string, and a voice as rough and warm as a cat’s tongue.

And, like *Song Cycle*, this record, is one of (and about) artifice: the process of recording as much as the material recorded. For the musician and writer both, there are limitless possibilities in the audible ether: the sonic companions of static and hiss and the furniture of effects; the telescoping effect of a voice recorded faraway, scratchy, double-tracked. M Ward, it seems, has always known this, too.

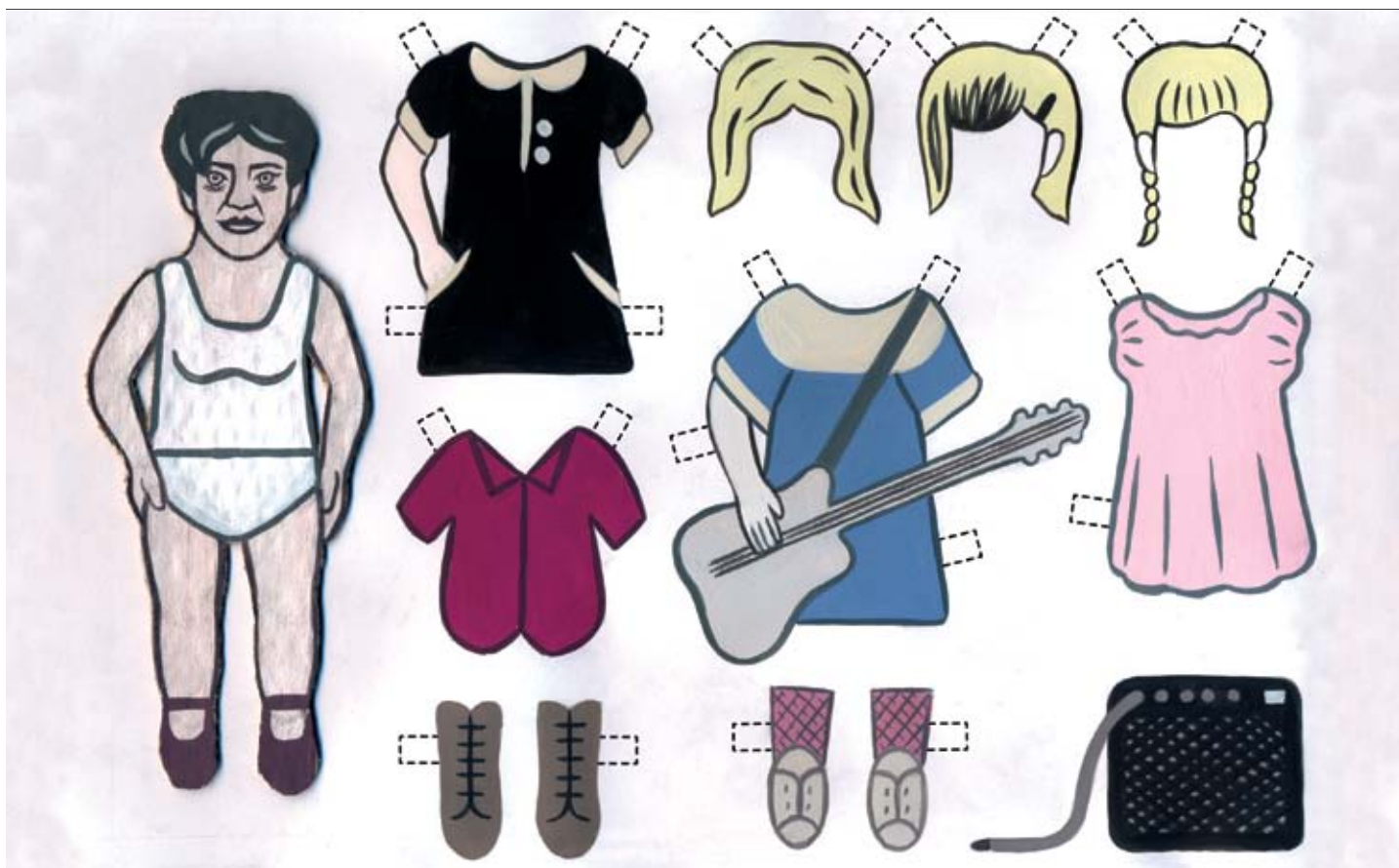
And that, maybe, is why he’s made the ultimate non-bootleg bootleg album. *Transistor Radio* plays out like a compilation made by a friend, one you rediscover so often until it takes on your own stories, your own holy moments, “*Like sunshine multiplying/ Through Virgin Mary in stained glass*” (‘Lullaby And Exile’). Because he knows that music over airwaves is the most complex, simple, elegant, messy equation most of us have ever known; he knows that it’s morse code for love. You’ll get burned, he warns, “*if you don’t know where your love is at*”. Mine – right now – is right here.

The clean swoop of a slide on a string, and a voice warm and rough as a cat’s tongue

bedrooms and midnight gardens just as the car radio symbolised freedom, escape and wide open roads. Now, it’s no one’s companion. Our networks are multi-directional spider webs; our horizons are wide. We no longer strain to catch the little analogue signals that promised magic and safety in equal measures.

Now we have tiny, smooth transmitters that rest snug in our ears, drowning the din of the world, feeding us those signals digitally and whenever we choose. But we still need those crystalline moments when familiarity joins the inexpressible and the sparkling brand new in a stolen kiss and a dawn

they delight in the interplay of the songwriters’ Venn diagrams, setting the orbs of influence and the spheres of sentiment spinning. Ward’s ostensibly throwaway version of ‘Sweethearts On Parade’, for example, with its rueful refrain of “*How I pine/Just to fall in line...*” and old-time shifts from major to minor, over a wholly modern fuzzed up backing and Stephen Stills outro, confuses and seduces, in equal measure. Elsewhere, Ward spins the wheels of influence the opposite way: ‘Fuel For Fire’ bases its melody on the tune of ‘Help Me Make It Through The Night’ and balances its Nashville lament with lyric about using loneliness as inspiration. Van Dyke



kat on form

Words: **Miss AMP**

Illustration: **Till Thomas**

Babes In Toyland And Kat Bjelland
The Best Of Babes In Toyland And Kat Bjelland
(WSM)

There's a girl on the stage. Big cow zombie eyes. Face like curds and whey. Albino hair, with a little-girl fringe. Her lipstick is inches thick, not smeared, but ready to be. Her guitar playing is grating, frantic. The drums are clattering, crashing, arrhythmic but inevitable, like a dropped alcopop bottle careening around the top deck of a bus.

The girl twirls around on the heels of her granny shoes. Drops her top half forward so her hair hangs low, obscuring her guitar. Snaps up straight, hair splattering across her back. Grimaces into the microphone. Squeals. Howls. Screams.

The girl – Kat – is mesmerising. She looks defenceless in her baby-doll dress: big lacy collars hanging down; a child's hairslide at her temple; sturdy lace-up shoes at the end of skinny legs – and then she starts to sing. She contorts her face, whispers, girlishly: *"Vomit... my... heart..."* then bellows, eyes popping: *"PULL MY LEGS APART!"*

Her howl is abdominal, abominable. She's not vulnerable. She's *possessed*.

Being an all-girl band around in the early Nineties, Babes in Toyland are often erroneously lumped in with the riot grrrl movement. Don't make that mistake. Typical grrrl concerns, like all-female shows, equal representation in the moshpit, and bigging up your fave neighborhood rebel girl were never what the Babes were all about.

Taxi and the Voodoo Queens, what a sweet relief to be able to slap 'Fontanelle' down on the turntable and scream sacrilegiously along with Kat: *'You fucking bitch/You cunthole bitch.'* I'd never before heard pure hatred so gleefully, gloriously, liberatingly encapsulated.

This collection has rather too much of the Babes' later career, plus far too much Crunt and Katastrophy Wife (OK, a few songs, but that's far too much) to really be considered a 'best of'.

**I'd never before heard pure hatred so gleefully,
gloriously, liberatingly encapsulated**

Babes in Toyland's unheinged, abrasive, furious noise dealt with bigger shit: gnawing female appetites, Sadean power struggles, ulcerating lusts, betrayal. In one video interview from this collection, Kat twirls her hands confusedly at the thought of all this 'politics' that she didn't know came along with being in a band. "I just wanted to make music," she says. "Get the anger out."

In the midst of all the grrrl love emanating from the rest of my record collection, the Bratmobile and Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear and Linus and Mambo

Old-skool fans might be interested in the short films, videos and bonus footage of a very young Kat in *The Venarays*.

Otherwise, if you're new to Babes in Toyland, skip this collection and get the early albums *To Mother, Spanking Machine*, *Fontanelle* and *Painkillers*, preferably on their original puke-green and blood-red vinyl.

Those records are where the Babes' real hatred, bile, and glittering fury reside – and they're mesmerising.

500mg

Vertical Approach (Galactic Zoo Disk)

500mg is the *nom de plume* assumed by Michael Gibbons of Bardo Pond, and *Vertical Approach* documents a small clutch of solo bedroom recordings. Away from the Bardo Pond motherhip, Gibbons lets the heavy air of that band's horizontally developed layers of fuzz fall away to reveal a guitarist fascinated with the interplay between revolving drones and buzzing, mutating strings. The shorter pieces are the most successful, tackling singular approaches to the guitar and peeling stream-of-consciousness strings of notes from the instrument. When he attacks longer compositions, they're almost modular

in design, and rely heavily on drone behaviour. The most gorgeous cuts, 'Miserable Miracle' and 'Rudra', sound like long-lost home demos from some-time Popol Vuh guitarist Daniel Fichelscher. Unlike Bardo Pond's horizontal, laminar rock music, these 500mg pieces are vertical in nature, more interested in letting one or two elements slowly meander toward conclusion.

Jon Dale

Apparat

Silizium (Shitkatapult)

Collecting Apparat's May 2004 Peel Session and a handful of remixes, *Silizium* is perfectly poised pop always on the brink of rapture. Can-cool, but less techno-taut than last

year's *Shapemodes*, the Peel session is stunning: lush violin-spun mini-dramas that wouldn't sound out of place on Constellation, toughened up with 'Ice Rink'-minimal breakbeats that stu-t-t-t-er so immaculately you hide your bitten fingernails in disgust. There's an emotional chiaroscuro here, the unenviable fearlessness of music so built for headphones – because it's yours and no one else's. But there's also a glorious love of pop music: 'Komponent' is so playful it's feline; Rechenzentrum's click-house mix of 'Not A Good Place' emphasises the original's elemental joy; the rest glides with a savagely graceful intent. Let this set off fireworks in your daydreams.

Chris Ballard

Art Of Fighting

Second Storey (Trifekta)

Boy gets girl. Boy loses girl. Boy begins to crave the sad troubadour records missing from his collection. Boy makes inquiries about records he loaned to her. Boy asks girl nicely to give them back. Boy gets frustrated and yells, "Give me back my records!" Boy writes a stormy, delicate mood piece called *Second Story*, singing about the shape his heart is in. At the same time he subliminally wishes for the safe return of his Elliott Smith records, even though – as it turns out – those records were hers all along.

Boy cowers in embarrassment.

Shane Moritz

silence kit

Words: **Stevie Chick**

Illustration: **Superdead**



A thing of gaudy glory and ensnaring riddles that returns all the concentration you invest in it

The Mars Volta

Frances The Mute (Universal)

'Tremulant', The Mars Volta's dense and puzzling debut EP, tried too hard to cross-pollinate their love of salsa, afrobeat, glitch, ambient, and free-jazz, sounding like several jarring records playing all at once. For their first album, *Deloused In The Comatorium*, the most corporeal of concepts – the comatose visions of suicidal artist and friend Julio Venegas – saw them focus these influences: Fela-esque barrages of rhythm abounded, and their riffs blared with the drama of flamenco. Forget the 'prog' tag they were saddled with by the dullard mindhive – this was truly *progressive* music, drawing on seeds sown outside of the traditional rock canon to propel their already corrosive hardcore into a multi-dimensional future.

Deloused... begged many questions, chiefly, where to next? A clue lay in guitarist Omar R Rodriguez-Lopez's solo album, *A Manual Dexterity*, and the song 'Deus Ex Machina', a pure slice of salsa written and performed by his father, Angel Marcelo, and lovingly fucked-with by Omar after the fact. It was Cuba, channelled via lysergic

satellite linkup to Saturn, and it casts a broad shadow over *Frances The Mute*. Larry Harlow, salsa legend, lends piano to the blasts of Latin brass that wander through the album. Chunks of the lyric sheet are in Spanish (the thematic conceit revolves around an outsider's search for his adoptive parent, told via a diary discovered by The Mars Volta's prematurely-deceased sound manipulator, Jeremy Ward), but then vocalist Cedric Bixler-Zavala has always preferred poetic incomprehensibility over narrative clarity. At times, *Frances The Mute* sounds like some manic splice of futuristic jazz-rock and the kind of brash Hispanic pop you might imagine blaring out of the windows of cheap cars in Omar's native San Juan. But The Mars Volta's radical soundclash really isn't as listener-unfriendly as it may initially seem. For the odd proposition they make – standing equidistant between the voluminous swagger of Zeppelin, the military funk of Fela, the blue mantras of electric Miles, the fiery blitz of salsa, and the more futuristic explorations in electronica and hardcore – on *Frances The Mute* they parse a powerful Esperanto from the blizzard of noise inside their heads.

Unfortunately, there's very little progression from their original three-minute, three-chord grind. The guitars and bass are fuzzed up and dirty, but only to add weight to unimaginative riffs. Practically every song follows the same formula. Only the chiming atmospheric and rhythmic gear changes of 'When I Set My Mind To Forget' suggests that they will eventually escape the shackles of their old scene.

Lianne Steinberg

Bonnie Prince Billy &

Matt Sweeney

Superwolf (Domino)

Eschewing the ornate, almost gothic tendencies of some of his recent releases, *Superwolf* finds Oldham in righteous Southern rock mode. Co-written with long-time friend and collaborator Matt Sweeney, the record sparkles and chimes with harmonic hallelujahs and electric amens. It shares a certain starkness with 2003's *Master And Everyone*, but whereas the latter album was almost bent double under the weight of its own melancholia, *Superwolf* emerges from its battles fierce-eyed and triumphant. The searching opener 'My Home Is The Sea' encapsulates the spirit of the album perfectly, with its absurdisms – "I love my tummy/It's round and firm and funny" – and its breathless wisdom – "I know nothing and I'm overjoyed" – pitched on top of a rolling blues riff. *Superwolf* is filled all at once with wanderlust and dreams of domestic bliss, the search for spiritual and physical love, the desire for companionship and solitude.

Natalie Moore

Boom Bip

Blue Eyed In The Red Room (Lex)

Blue Eyed In The Red Room is like sitting down at the Boom Bip table and breaking bread with him. After dinner you retire to the lounge and gaze out of his window together. Birds soar over the peaks of tree-coated mountains. The sun sets hazily in the sky. You turn the volume up and everything feels new again. Created with live performance in mind, Bryan Hollon chose not to use samples here. Instead, he makes the sounds himself, and attains an admirable air of instrumental accomplishment. Gruff Rhys (Super Furry Animals) performs Neubautesque vocal duties on 'Do's and Don'ts'. Yet it's almost a shame that Boom Bip is so successful in reflecting his world's movements in his music: charming as it is, it's hard to hear it as more than a soundtrack. But it's a bloody lovely one, mind. And it was nice of him to invite us over.

Ki Ellwood

The Boy Least Likely To

The Best Party Ever (Too Young To Die)

The sleeve has a drawing of assorted animals bashing colourful drums, guitars and xylophones, wearing jaunty paper hats and clutching red balloons. They look like they were drawn by a six-year-old. Isn't it great when albums wear their hearts on their sleeves? The three essential seven-inch singles are all collected here; from the purring Dexys-meets-Badly Drawn Boy of 'Fur Soft As Fur' through the Brian Wilson acid-laced soda-Pop of 'Paper Cuts' to 'Be Gentle With Me', which is the sound of The Undertones picking forget-me-nots along a farm track in July. The Boy Least Likely To

Asja Auf Capri

Novi Ronde (Difficult Fun)

Marx has written that history repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce. Named after Asja Lacis, the Latvian Marxist theatre director who stole Walter Benjamin's heart and attempted, but ultimately failed, to donate it to the Communist party, Asja Auf Capri suggest that third time around is paranoia. "Everything has already been and yet I still join in time and time again", sings Anja Kirschner on 'Chanson Risk'. Together with Antifamily's David Panos, she flawlessly recreates and possibly even improves on the darker side of the *Neue Deutsche Welle* sound. On *Novi Ronde*, they marry the minimal synth of DAF with Weltklang's restless panic, Malaria's cool intonations with Grauzone's icy mono synths and Einstürzende Neubauten's rust flavoured metallic bangings with Gina X's X-factor. Laid over with tense German vocals, the result is a sound of fear and anxiety befitting our times (unless, like us, you find German more funny than scary).

The minimal sound of the original NDW was born out of the technophobia of the generation of electronic musicians between disco and acid house, decaying city centres, extreme capitalism and the very cold war. To recreate today what was the depressing musical reflection of a politically oppressive era could easily be seen as courageous, albeit misguided, idealism, along the lines of last year's DDR nostalgia film, *Goodbye Lenin*. But Asja Auf Capri's claustrophobic resurfacing of a movement until recently in complete hibernation is more like the application of sandpaper to a dusty past than a glossy coat of varnish to second hand sounds.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv

Lou Barlow

Emoh (Domino)

I hate Lou fuckin' Barlow, but it's scary how many great songs he wrote for *Emoh*. I'm sure people like Damien Rice would lick Leonard Cohen's toilet brush to get across something this simple and this powerful. 'If I Could' sounds like a double-dutched country ballad, while 'Monkey Begun' strips down the krautrock of the Folk Implosion and dresses it in pure sorrow. And after hearing 'Morning's After Me' you may well buy a shotgun and hit the West looking for the meaning of life, joining this modern day cowboy for equal rounds of beers and tears. I feel blessed for being able to listen to this.

Slobodan Vujanovic

The Beat Up

Black Rays Defence (Fantastic Plastic)

They may protest fervently, but The Beat Up, with their anthemic single, 'Bad Feeling', were typical of the Sonic Mook/Hoxton garage rock sound of 2002. But *Black Rays Defence*, produced by Kevin Shields, should have set them up as true contenders.

inhabits a world populated by bedroom troubadours swapping dreams of Postcard singles discovered in charity shops for 10p and of the day they took a picnic on Box Hill with Russian Futurists. Sublime summery sweetness charged with an edginess that's all coy fringes and cloaked switchblades.

Alistair Fitchett

Cat On Form

A Blanket Over Your Eyes (Southern)

"Cat On Form believe that we do not have to put up with the lack of control we have over our lives, we do not have to put up with adverts that coerce us into buying lifestyles by telling us we are ugly, fat, stupid and un-cool. We believe we can take back control for ourselves, starting with youth culture. We advocate discordance, freeform expression, shouting and dynamic loss of control." (From www.catonform.co.uk.)

Man, they flared briefly. Began late 2001, in Brighton. Developed into explosive kinetic live force. Challenged preconceptions and blistered feet with abrasive, intelligent hardcore. Smashed beer glasses. Lost themselves in the moment. Released one full-length. Toured US in 2004 where these six tracks were recorded, all first takes, no overdubs. Switched from political to personal and back. Ensnared attitudes, beliefs. Engendered a sense of community among those who are least culpable to same sense. Final gig, Brighton's Free Butt – four songs are included here 'secretly', a worthy documentation, but like bottling fire in a jam jar. The future looks bright.

Everett True

Dälek

Absence (Ipecac)

Dälek bring the noise. This album has sprinkled meat tenderiser into my ears and drilled holes into my brain. It has me wrapped up and rocking on the floor. I can't get enough. It builds vast walls of sound which reach right up around me and out into the sky. It suggests that this world isn't a cage; it's just another surface to climb. Dälek's strongest weapon is their language. There's something ancient and guttural in the way their metaphors flow. A constant intonation that battle calls for brains not blood, as at the end of 'Asylum': "Defiant of airwaves designed to tailor how I act / I drop the fists and guns and use this tongue to combat". Ever wondered what the rest of the hip hop literati would sound like if they turned the dial up to 11? Wonder no more.

Ki Ellwood

Death From Above 1979

You're A Woman, I'm A Machine (679)

Eleven tracks of yelping about women, dragged over a dirge of paint-stripping riffs? Do we really need this?

Um, yes please! Me! Over here! And if anyone even dares to whisper the word "Datsuns", well, they can fuck right off because these guys have got ten times more bombast and a hundred times more soul and, damn, you can't help but think they're singing about L-O-V-E. And not just the size of her arse for a fucking change. This is metal with its head in the right place, and not up its own rear end. This is rock music swaggering out of the bathroom naked and blessed by the gods with sensual timing. This is ace.

Hayley Avron



Don't look too close It might spoil everything

first draughts

Words: **Everett True**

Illustration: **Charles Redmond**

The Blow

Everyday Examples Of Humans Facing Straight Into The Blow (K)

Poor Aim: Love Songs (K/Slender Means Society & States Rights)

I've always been suspicious of beauty.

I prefer the warped, the uneasy. The girl in *Napoleon Dynamite*. Cats with an ear partly chewed off; a little precious tummy fat; emotional love songs spoiled by the proximity of alcohol and banter; hesitation; sleep deprivation. It seems that if you chase an ideal that everyone else is chasing, it no longer remains so personal. I don't care to chase these worries too deeply, though. It would cause me to miss out on the following: Chan Marshall's demented live persona (which I only experience vicariously through the writings of others), the deeply soulful, restless Americana of M Ward; Phil Elvrum's spacious, capricious enjoyment of the outdoor world in Mount Eerie (formerly The Microphones); and these two CDs from the canon of Portland songstress Khaela Maricich.

The first is a reissue from the time Khaela went by the name of Get The

Hell Out Of The Way Of The Volcano (2000-1): a jumble of secret passions and echoed arpeggios that fumble and engage with a delicate, schoolyard feel, recorded so intimately you feel voyeuristic listening in. "Thank you: everyone who listens past the scranky guitar notes to catch the warm parts," the lady writes inside. "These are the skeletons."

Some of the time, Khaela is humming to herself over circular acoustic guitar patterns; other times she's expressing bittersweet desire, hiccuping slightly like Laurie Anderson ('Surf Song', 'My Heart') or shadowing distant shades of gospel ('Milkmaid'). These songs are so personal, you find yourself catching your breath scared it might blow them away. Piano briefly litters 'Did You Drive'; elsewhere it's like experiencing a whispered version of rudimentary early Eighties female pop stars Trixie's Big Red Motorbike. This is a fragile beauty indeed: not one to be shouted from the treetops or blared out of iPods, but to be kept secret, kept safe – a guilty pleasure for years to come, the photograph already yellowed and crumbling at the edges.

Poor Aim: Love Songs is a collaboration with Jona Bechtolt

(Y.A.C.H.T, The Badger King) and is much more fleshed out and inviting – albeit with minimalist beats that recall fellow K artists C.O.C.O.'s casually brilliant grooves and the playful laptop electronica of Cex and Kid606. Synths undulate. Vocals stutter and cry sweetly in solitude. The mood is still very introspective: a conceptual album that deals with failed love and the failings of love; deceptions, wrongful addictions, missed phone calls and – on the almost brutally simple 'Let's Play Boys Chase Girls' – the secrets of love revealed. "Boys," Khaela cries plaintively over a flurry of percussion, "The secret about girls is that they want you to like them/They want you to like them." The opening 'Hey Boy', meanwhile, is a heart warming unrequited love song to match Nagisa Ni Te. Sometimes it doesn't work (cf. the limpid 'Knowing The Things That I Know'). Sometimes, Khaela's truncated vocals can sound too mannered. But when it does – 'Hey Boy', the decidedly infectious closer 'Come On Petunia', the trip hop 'The Love That Crave...' – you feel The Blow could give Modest Mouse a run for the student dance floors of America.

Don't look too close. It might spoil everything.

Chicks On Speed And The No Heads Press The Spacebar (Chicks On Speed)

Chicks On Speed were inspiring once. They were, weren't they? I'm sure they were. Art-electro-fashion-feminist collective ramshackle-DIY-pro-good-stuff-anti-bad-stuff Germanic thingy. Miss AMP said some cool stuff about debauched sex to do with them. Probably. You remember. Inspiration! Excitement! Chicks On Speed!

And this... well, obviously they don't play guitars, so get Barcelona's The No Heads to do it. It's ramshackle electro-bits joined at the hips with taut art-rock. It still bristles with ideas. Problem is, none of them seem particularly good ones.

It all starts going wrong within zero seconds. Opener 'The Household Song' recalls the ironic display and subversion of stereotypes of, say, The Slits' 'Typical Girls',

with its gleeful list of noting how fucking hot the housework gets them. Main difference is that I don't remember wanting to drown The Slits. This Hausfrau's litany is as smug and self-satisfied failed an agit-comedy as Le Tigre at their worst.

Starting at its nadir, at least it can only get better. 'Class War' alternates between punky-blurs of guitars and sloganeering to spoken word dialectic over a fog. "Where are these terrorists anyway?" we're asked, "On Wall Street?" Yeah. Take that, suits. I bet you feel really ashamed now. Politics is a glorious topic for pop-songs, but by 'Culture Vulture', we've faded to grey and I feel about as sexy as dried vegan porridge.

The treatment here fails its material. Important stylistic difference: this isn't ennui. It's boredom.

Kieron Gillen

Welcome back to being out of the loop, in no fold

put a spell on you

Words: Neil Kulkarni

Illustration: Robert Ramsden

The Howling Hex All Night Fox (Drag City)

When I last saw Royal Trux, I was unprepared for the sheer danger level that seemed to shoot out from them and suffuse the room. Not danger as in the usual r'n'r hotel-trashing puerility – danger as in it felt frightening, seeing how many possibilities they were toying with. And while Jennifer H was the focus of most people's attention, the most palpable waves of hostility to the universe were pouring from Neil Hagerty. Or rather, from this fucked-up little Fender box amp and the kind of guitar you'd pick up at Argos. There was a freedom and a fearlessness to what he did with that guitar that I'll never forget, and it's reinvoked every time I hear him.

So The Howling Hex have a lot of love to trash, simply by dint of his presence. Before a note is heard, this is a hip document. But you don't need to know the Trux to dig this. *All Night Fox* is a livid, searing lash of aggravation and contact-high noise that welcomes anyone in who wants to hear riffs

unshakeable, vocals unbreakable, patterns inescapable.

We're talking lip-smacking hooks courtesy of Hagerty's constant Eddie Hazel/John McLaughlin homage – his palette limited but kicking against its limitations in pleasingly aggressive fashion. Underneath we have the horniest, holiest, funkiest rhythm section this side of Can or The Silver Apples. Slathered over everything is Hagerty's whining tones, somewhere between abject filth and religious revelation, and two female voices heavily echoplexed and coming on like The Feminine Complex or Grace Slick wandering the sewers.

'Now We're Gonna Sing' kicks things off on a collision of The Pretty Things 'Come See Me' and The Creation's 'Making Time', and that should tell you how ace it is. 'Instilled With Mem'ry' lives in its dubbed-out space as much as its bustling Beefheart undertow, before 'Pair Back Up Mass With' *slays* ya – a slo-mo, arse-pummellingly, toe-curlingly funky take on 'Sister Ray'-style repetition with enough psych-out touches to reach those parts of your brain you'd rather leave unravaged.

'Activity Risks' comes on like Tarnation backed by PiL; 'What Man? Who Are You?!' takes seven minutes of your life and gives you back a holy headache, only slightly relieved by 'Cast Aside The False' – Ronettes/Roches-style soul played by dirty, dirty people. 'Soft Enfolding Spreads' waves you back to the beginning with the best music Hagerty's made since Royal Trux's *Accelerator*, and perhaps the most mindblowing since their *Twin Infinities*. It's probably best to have never heard Hagerty before – keep The Howling Hex as your first exposure to his unquenchable drive to mutual headfuck. Cos he hasn't been as locked-on and out of control for too damn long.

Welcome back to being out of the loop, in no fold, with only this goddamn irresistible sound to hold you up as it frogmarches you into its depths and up into the cosmos. For all the echoes you hear within *All Night Fox*, what's truly frightening is that you have to invent your response as it occurs to you. Like all that will truly excite in 2005, *All Night Fox* is linked to *nothing* but its own red-eyed commitment to pursue its own tail, swallow you up with it, and devour itself out of existence. Let it pull you under, soon as.

Entrance

Wandering Stranger (Sketchbook)

That Entrance's Guy Blakeslee is neither the first nor the most arresting artist to travel down the dusty roads of old-time outsider America, armed with tumbling elf-locks and scatterbrained guitar, is hardly an issue, and should be forgotten forthwith. Nor is it instructive to measure him up against his influences, which, on his second album, appear to be spreading like a family tree away from the primitive Mississippi blues of his debut, *Careless Love*, and touching upon Tim Buckley, Townes Van Zandt, Tom Waits and Van Morrison. No, when you make music this iconic, this traditional, the only criteria are these: can you write a song that snags on the heartstrings and chokes the throat with tears? As Blakeslee slouches like a pretty, mangy, stray dog through the stomping, yodelling title track down to tripped-out country sparklers and godforsaken gospel and a surprisingly full (and full-on) 'Lonesome Road', the magic feels forced

somehow. You have to will it on yourself, close your eyes, ask, "is this working yet?" And if you have to ask this of anything, the answer is, usually, "no". Yet the impact of 'Make Me A Pallet On Your Floor' suggests otherwise. It's like a sleepy little dance between, oddly, the English folk laments of Anne Briggs *et al*, and the sedated, bubblegum heartbreak of the Velvets' 'Pale Blue Eyes'. It holds you spellbound for all of six minutes. It's a start, you know?

Frances May Morgan

Listening Pleasure: Guy Blakeslee

"During recording I had no real home; all I had were a few tapes in my walkman. The great and surprisingly unknown Sandy Bull was one of my favourites. He was one of the true pioneers of psychedelia. I also had a tape of my favourite Charley Patton songs that I travelled with until it fell out of my walkman and onto a train track at a tube stop in London. His intensity and poetry have never been matched."

Die Monitr Batss

Girls Of War (Troubleman Unlimited)

Skronkier than a Zorn with a horn, jerkier than a teenage messiah, the Batss' follow up to last year's collected singles is the official debut of a band that has already more than earned its stripy T-shirts, as a spin-off of The Gossip and Sleetmute Nightmute. On *Girls Of War* they sound like Big Black-era Steve Albini after the kerosene's run out and the only thing left to demolish is a stuttering saxophone and a broken bassline. If confusion is sex, after that is exhaustion; the corpses of post punk strapped to the chair and brought to brief spasms of life by intermittent electrocution. Where this record succeeds is in making you think it would be fun to be the one flicking the switch on and off.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv

Don Nino

On The Bright Scale (Prohibited)

While the vocal of Franco-American 'Don Nino', (Nicolas Laureau) has its David Grubbs/Jim O'Rourke moments, what's most

beguiling is that on closer inspection and immersion this superficially modest oddity constantly darts into strange depths. Wayward bossas and Debussy matrices, kalimba and thumb piano all conspire to spirit beautiful songs and instrumentals away from the arid wastes of generic lo-fi math-folk and into dripping forests of dark wonder. There's too much use of electronics as cheap jewellery these days, augmenting with a voguish smattering of perfumery farts and burbles. On *The Bright Side* shoves these elements up front; as atmospherically skewed as everything else here, simultaneously fragile and forthright and dusting it all with a pristine electron glaze.

James Papademetrie

Erasure

Nightbird (Mute)

Without whom: no shimmering tutus by the seaside, no Tank, no Swan and no Balloon. No Vince Clarke (or Depeche Mode, or Alison Moyet), no Andy Bell (a nightingale cowboy at high-noon): no king and queen of loved-up digi-pop and downtown electro

and inveigling tunes. No posters on my pre-teen bedroom walls; no jotter scrawls of 'Who Needs Love Like That?' (And rightly — who *does*, when you're seven and saving cats?) No droning synth-dirge on the awesome *The Circus*; no Romeo-techno on arch-anthem, 'Sometimes'.

No Wheatus (OK, there's a hole in my argument).

No vaudevillian 'Phantasmagorical' shows. No *Nightbird*, that lands like an old friend; carries their finest songs in years or more: a rekindled affair betwixt sublime chime-pop and beatific, swooning disco.

No doubt they'll be making these songs forever. No wonder, I venture, I still love Erasure.

Nicola Meighan

Food

Last Supper (Rune Grammofon)

Norwegian jazz trumpeter Arve Henriksen is never afraid to emphasise the lyrical and spiritual in what can be a shockingly detached area of music; I love him for that. His performances with Supersilent shine a warm light through their turbulence; at his solo shows, audiences hum harmonies at his command. In *Food*, he finds his perfect foil in British saxophonist Iain Ballamy: from the 'Exeter Opening,' their interplay builds from tentative, suggestive overtures to canon-like passages shot through with electronic treatments. These provide wholly instinctive-sounding flutters, smears and undertows: as if the music's been frayed at the edges or shaken from below, and Henriksen's whispers meet Ballamy's winding tones in a shifting, shuffling landscape that dazzles and disorients.

Thomas Strønen, on percussion and production, provides this landscape. Strønen's acoustic percussion captivates, but his electronics work pulls the music into wonderfully alien territory, glitching, modulating and scuttling through 'Exeter Ending' and formulating both deathly growls and chiming resonances in 'First Supper' (featuring Henriksen's odd, airy vocals).

And *Food*'s music is, above all, generous in its melodies and textures: it's some of the most accessible esoteric modern jazz being made right now. All it demands is a little stillness on your part. Listen; digest.

Frances May Morgan

Furtips

Gourmet Sounds (Independent)

A tribute to some fine chefs by some Dutch screwballs, infusing old recipes with opiate grins and gold absurdities. *Gourmet Sounds* pays respect to Pere Ubu, Pet Shop Boys, TV Personalities, Swell Maps, Monkees, Mekons and many more. It's an impossibly tuneful, scatological pop meddle studded by atonal wipe outs, screeching noise-pop flurries, with song after song doused in good, old-fashioned dementia.

Furtips are the not-quite-right merger of Monkees-style mayhem and Pavement's more artful guitar charms. Since inception, Furtips have conceived three perfectly awesome CDs, a cassette, three seven-inches, become one of my all-time favourite bands and, at the same time, consolidated their proud position as one of Holland's least successful musical ventures. Mostly nice, occasionally scary, *Gourmet Sounds* is some dish.

Shane Moritz



into the woods

Words: **Frances May Morgan**

Illustration: **Vincent Vanoli**

Tusk

Tree Of No Return (Tortuga)

The line between my eyebrows deepens, furrows, branches into tiny new rivulets of experience. My ear canals are bruised and my perfect pitch flattened (by my estimation) by half a semitone. Accelerated decline: see it here. Been rubbing my face on the comfort blanket of sonic grazes and slaps and scratches and yowls one time too many. Diminishing returns, I think it's called. These chewed-up nails and cuticles and toughened bassist's fingertips have scrawled and typed too many paens to the Heavy and the Loud, tried too many times to speak of a love that should be wrestled in the dark, silent save for occasional laughter and wordless sounds of pleasure and of disbelief.

In the dark, my love affair with metal is pure, filthy, righteous. Made public, it reveals itself to be an unsustainable sham, a relationship I have no idea how to navigate. Even as I embrace the slabs of sound, even as I smile, blissed out, into the chasm of sonic chaos, I sometimes feel the shame of someone who's strayed way out of her league; the blind stupidity and arrogance of the kind of person who dresses up an animal in human clothes (remember, people: this is not funny; it's sick and wrong). My presence at this party is legitimised by my writerly status, but only just. If I can just describe how I feel, tell you what the fuck I am doing, here, in your world, I might get some peace. But the more I describe, the further my visceral, spontaneous reactions slide out of reach. No wonder I dance so hard, deep-fry my senses and deaden my hearing. It's called

mortification, isn't it? That tasty blend of self-harm and embarrassment? My Oxford Dictionary of Saints is not to hand; I cannot give you examples. Trust me.

For these are my notes for a(nother) descent into the underworld: my last voyage as self-styled doom diarist. Come the spring you'll find these words in the newly thawed earth, barely readable and buried beneath a battered CD walkman still bearing a peeling Noxagt sticker. Skip to track 5. Sure, the other tracks are enjoyably rotten things, quagmires and sloughs of despond; for madmen, only, is Tusk's *Tree Of No Return*. But for madmen, especially, is 'Ursus Arctus: Walk In The Valley'.

You want eloquence and sincerity? Read the metal fans' online reviews of this record. They believe in it. They truly lose themselves in the wyrd wildscape evoked by this Chicagoan psych-grindcore four-piece, who, incidentally are three parts Pelican, not that you'd guess right away. If Pelican are the keepers of the castle, knightly types, noble like shire horses, Tusk are the gibbering soothsayers hanging round the gates. And 'Ursus Arctus' sits on that point of madness at which great truth is revealed.

First, it's tuneless. That in itself means nothing. But this song (let's call it a song, it's a fucking song and a half) is smart. It gives the *impression* of tune, while dispensing with melody entirely. It contains harmony. You can pick the lines apart. But they have no notes. If this isn't the epitome of what noise can — and should — do, then I don't know what is. Second, it's vocal-less. But it gives the impression of vocals in a similarly hallucinatory, topsy-turvy way. Free from the growling and spitting voice that dominates the rest of the album, a chorus of Munch-like screaming, wailing and keening (all guitar-generated) tugs at

the corners of your soul with sticky, insistent fingers. Someone is shaking you by the shoulders, and pointing you in the direction of nameless dread; this is the sound you're making.

Third, it's trashy. It's fucking silly. It's a stinking holy fool of a record. No grand gestures, no processional pomp here. No. 'Ursus Arctus' is dirty and mad and degraded and as completely utterly gorgeous as a rabid, gleaming polar bear on a toxic waste dump. Its drums are drunken, masterful, metal-by-numbers at the start, unhinged and virtuosic by the end. Its synths swoop and wibble; they'd make Heldon sound restrained. By the time anything even slightly resembling a hook or

My Oxford Dictionary of Saints is not to hand

a riff comes in, it's awesomely crap, a little two-note distorted thing that soon falls, dejected, into nothing, but not before the song's entire, full, busy, hyper-dense texture implodes — sideways, of course — to reveal a vast, thrumming, empty space. Which is the place we're all looking for as we close our eyes and fuck up our ears. Which is why there are so many rock things called Ultima Thule.

Always tired and always tantalised, I've been hanging out there a little too long and a little too hard. It's time for a change. Me and my doom, we're going back into the dark, where words mean nothing. Next month: Debussy. Jazz. Micro-house. Silence. Promise.



northern soul

Words: **Everett True**

Illustration: **No one wanted to do it so I Googled a map**

Various

Sympathetic Sounds Of Montreal (Sympathy For The Record Industry)

There are several reasons why this compilation merits your attention. First, the record label itself has been synonymous with a certain type of dirty, gritty, stripped-back rock'n'roll since its inception in an LA bedroom, 1988. We're talkin' Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochran. We're talkin' Mick Collins. We're talkin' boys with slicked-down sideburns and girls with bouffant cuts. We're talkin' Billy fuckin' Childish. No frills – not many, leastways. "I like rock'n'roll and most of its mutant offspring," founder Long Gone John once remarked.

Shake those asses, brothers and sisters. Shake those asses

"I like girl vocalists a lot. I like hybrid fucked-up blues. I like pop music." There's plenty of the first here: and a fair smattering of the second.

Second: location. America sucks. Canada is where it's at: why else did every last Democrat talk about moving on up there after the recent Presidential election. Clean air, decent health care and a government that doesn't feel it has to commit wanton acts of corporate terrorism to stay on top. You know the score. It's also a deeply unfashionable country – independent music-wise – and

music scenes usually only take hold when no one else is paying attention (Dunedin, Fife, Seattle, Detroit, Olympia). This album follows on from where the other two *Sympathetic Sounds* collections left off – and even if the one centred round ace East London engineer Liam Watson's Toe-Rag studios didn't have the knock-on effect some would have wished for (unless it was to inspire Busted to claim allegiance to allegedly "independent" labels), the first in the series (Detroit) helped fuel The White Stripes' revolution. So yeah, the third and most important reason: the music. Man, this rocks. From the primitive seven-inch punk-blues of Scat Rag Boosters (like The Soledad Brothers tossed into a barnyard with the Flat Duo Jets) to the outrageously livid Fifties yowl of the one-man BBQ, and Priscillas swing of The Del Gators, there are 21 tracks here of solid gone action. Although the Detroit chapter may boast more variance, the Montreal bands match their better-known brethren sneer for sneer, sweaty lick for sweaty lick. There are 10 of them here; plus one Toronto outfit, the awesome Deadly Snakes whose full on psychedelic, keyboard-drenched take on Eddie Floyd's 'Big Bird' provides one of the highlights. The Cut Offs' 'Death Rattle' marries screechy female vocals to a demented Richard Hell-like nasal challenge: the youthful trio in The Cheating Hearts borrow fairly heavily from The Heartbreakers' template: Royal Routes spew out their three minutes of intuitive punk rock/soul with such Dr Feelgood desperation you fear for their souls. Les Sexareenos, meanwhile, are much more party-minded; like a garage full of Kingsmen and Sonics fans getting together for one last shutdown.

Shake those asses, brothers and sisters. Shake those asses. As the good lady Rachel from The Detroit Cobras once put it, "Dancing leads to fucking". Amen to that.

Adam Green

Gemstones (Rough Trade)

Adam Green has put out a restraining order on me due to excessive stalking and disproportionate swooning, so this album is a godsend. It's the closest I can legally get to the boy genius, the prince among indie boys, the sometime Moldy Peach.

Despite maturing musically, he still has the sense of humour of a porn-obsessed 13-year-old: there's much talk of "cocks", women with odd gynaecological problems and lots of drugs. If your mate did it, it would be about as funny as breaking your foot, but when Adam does it, it's like a thousand Converse-clad angels pouring honey in your

ears. *Gemstones* is the world's greatest country/rock'n'roll musical – it just doesn't have a Broadway show to go with it yet.

It makes me want to dance; it makes me want to go to a hoedown. But most of all, it makes me want to hang around outside his house, hoping to catch a glimpse.

Leonie Cooper

Hiltmeyer Inc

Sending 70 (Gomma)

In some ways, Jesus is just how you imagined him: long, girly hair; white robes; and a dopey, sympathetic gaze. But there are surprises too: half his face is that of an evil robot, with one piercing red eye; his robes resemble cellophane; his halo is neon pink; and a gun rests in each hand. Not quite the son of God, perhaps, but no evil nemesis either, he's the cover star/prophet of one person's idea of crazy fun, an irresistible combination of trancey melodrama, italo camp, squiggly disco flourishes and you'd-have-your-eye-out-on-that electro beats.

Sending 70 is as menacing as it is silly; it'd make you grin impishly, but you wouldn't trust it alone with your kids. It probably took a few hours to assemble, and might well fall apart before tomorrow morning. But let's enjoy the psychedelic gun-toting robot Jesus's company while he's around; he's unlikely to call again.

Robin Wilks

Hood

Outside Closer (Domino)

While never the most recognised band, Hood always seemed like the group who would carry the flag for adventurous indie music in Britain, each release improving on the previous one. On *Outside Closer* they have adopted sweeping strings and a sense of the drama of great pop like The Smiths, creating an album which is slick as an oil spill, and as romantic and hypnotic as golden light shimmering on water ripples.

The skittering beats, clicks and cut-ups are still here, darting around the songs like popcorn bursting in a bag, but, following on from the recent 'The Lost You' EP, Hood are also re-presenting themselves as a more accessible prospect for those who have previously shied away from their wilful obscurity and their often clinical sentiment.

George Taylor

Intelligence

Boredom And Terror (Narnack)

"Bootleg live album by The Fall," is what I said when applying to review this one. "Lo-fi post-punk," wrote someone else, somewhere else. The title (a false definition of Narnack) explains the intentions: kill boredom, don't ease up on terror. All songs last around two minutes, some sound like Beck being beaten by his turntables, for others you could swear Mark E. Smith was in the town at the time of their making. All of it is work of one guy named Lars. If he continues doing this for a good 30 years, he'll become as legendary as The Fall.

Slobodan Vujanovic

Marsen Jules

Herbstlaub (City Centre Offices)

A resurrected Dead Can Dance rising from the afterlife whilst digging early ambient Aphex, Stars Of The Lid and Fennesz, Marsen Jules is the new disguise of Martin Juhls. One endless wave of oppressive, cascading instrumentals, *Herbstlaub* – which roughly translates as "Autumn Leaves" – is an airless, weightless wonder; like Vangelis refusing to accept nature's will that calm must follow the storm.

A multi-layered mist that hovers around your ears long after its time in your airspace has passed.

Ian Fletcher

July Skies

The English Cold (Make Mine Music)

Antony Harding returns with his much anticipated second July Skies collection. *The English Cold* has a dedication "for lost airmen," is subtitled "1939-1945" and has song titles like 'Farmers And Villagers Living Within The Shadow Of Aerodromes', 'The Mighty 8th' and 'Death Was Where Your Sky Was,' all of which pretty much gives a good idea of what this album is about. It's about the distillation of ghosts into the gently glowing filament of music; about dreamy imaginations playing tricks on the daylight; about the metamorphosis of landscape and time. It's fragile and utterly mesmeric, with the haunting memory of Virginia Astley, Vini Reilly and Maurice Deebank floating through the vapour trails of Lancasters and B52s. More evocative than a million History Channel documentaries, more touching than poppies on a cenotaph.

Alistair Fitchett

The Kills

No Wow (Domino)

Tribute bands are back in favour: not even seen as an ironic pleasure, they provide easy access to cherished memories. Miss your adolescence when life seemed so much brighter? Don't tune in. Tune out. Or perhaps go see a reformed Slint, a cobbled-together Pixies... far better to vicariously live out the thrills of yr younger, keener self than face the reality of yourself as now.

I have little to say about The Kills' second album. It's excellent, entertaining, hits all the right buttons and chords. The songwriting is impeccable, Alison's voice as choked-up and sultry as you'd want, Jamie's minimal Rolling Stones inflections perfectly understated. It's going straight onto my iPod – the 2005 equivalent of The Clash's debut album, easy listening music to reassure and comfort. It's ace. The title track repeats the main phrase often. 'Rodeo Town' sees Alison stretching herself and singing, 'I Hate The One You Love' continues their first album motif of love-as-hate, abrasive and dynamic. Man. It's sweet.

Only trouble is, this identity isn't theirs at all. It's lifted wholesale from Polly Harvey's second album. Does that even matter anymore? I loved Polly Harvey's second album.

Everett True

Klute

No One's Listening Anymore (Commercial Suicide)

Who would have thunk it? That bloke from out of sk8rascal punks The Stupids grappling with drum'n'bass? That Tom Withers is now on his fourth full length outing as Klute? That it's rhythmic, tuneful and has the melody from *Singing In The Rain* in it? That over a double album the intricacy and dark, epidermis-raising hackleshuffle throws out a textured narrative that's part bedroom hero and part red blood zeromash. That tracks like 'Hidden Hand' and 'Make A Stand' bash out fuzz and freckle, fizz and speckled techno-passion, flashing and strobing and roaring and roving and skew-wiff with a rough-riff, knockaround, shark-snarl teeth-ground, dark-attack sharp-sound keep-it-in-da-underground fuck-drunk jungle-flunk slamdunk dirtjunk fleapit ease? It's all true. Shame nobody's been paying attention.

Joe Shooman



the true report

Words: Everett True

Illustration: Lucy Bailey

You stupid bastards.

You all went out and bought Radio 4 and Interpol records when you could've been succumbing to the sweet grooves of Bristol's **Mooz**: atonal punk rock and the rhythmic splendour of ESG; four girls who understood that silence is a rhythm too. They started up sweet and ended up brilliantly sullen and abrasive; their dissonant disaffection and jazz-tainted refrains couldn't have been further away from the populist cheerleader-ism of Yeah Yeah Yeahs if they'd tried. Strings got scraped. Voices got raised. Atmosphere got ladled. Mooz's second – and final – album, *My Property* (Blood Red Sounds) was recorded in one afternoon as a CDR to flog at their final gig, and is a more brilliant documentation of the *Careless Talk Costs Lives* aesthetic than anything this side of Young People or Erase Errata (although Gullick would hate it). It features the layered harmonies and deep sarcasm of 'Girl Watcher': it has a song named 'PMT'. There are bonus live tracks. Fingers are run down fretboards. Jeez! What more do you want?

I'd place Mooz next to three great, unheralded bands of the early Eighties – The Transmitters, political girl duo Toxic Shock and The Leopards ('Strange, Rhythmical Music') – and say this once more for all those who weren't paying attention and think Help She Can't Swim provide a challenge: you stupid bastards. How could you let this go unnoticed?

You fuckers.

Somewhere in the early Eighties, musicians started listening to what music critics told them, and in return we got

Frankie's 'The Power Of Love', the New Romantics, Talk bloody Talk and Jim Kerr. Instead of being content to stay a dynamic, experimental pop band, in love with Marxism, independence and early punk rock, **Scritti Politti** began to chase the golden carrot, nearly bankrupting a fine record label in the process (Rough Trade) and rapidly sliding into first album mediocrity.

Even now, frontman Green Gartside – the one with the Robert Wyatt pretensions and glib way round a musical phrase – refuses to admit what he threw away. "[This] sounds like some anti-produced labour of negativity, kind of structurally unsound and exposed, by design and default," he writes on the sleeve notes to *Early* (Rough Trade), an impeccable collection of his band's finest songs, including the Gang Of Four-esque radio voiceover on '28/8/78'. Ignore him. Despite being in thrall to the inspirational dogma and rhythmic challenges of Mayo Thompson's The Red Krayola, this is magical. And fuck yes: 'The Sweetest Girl' is still sublime pop perfection.

Two other classic reissues from the same era – we're talking late Seventies here, when making guitar-led music was still considered an act of insurrection, and spontaneity was king and queen, back when 'independent' didn't just mean you wanted to be the new Keane – are the brace of **Swell Maps** albums that original Map and TV Personality Jowe Head was kind enough to post me. Man, these records *shred*. Nikki Sudden's Thunders drawl is still naïve enough to transcend its influence, and there's such a joy in the very discovery of creation behind the debut Swell Maps album *A Trip To Marineville* (Polystar) it's more than I can do to not grab the head of the

You stupid bastards

nearest *Mojo* reader and scream, "LISTEN! LISTEN! This is what you've forgotten!" Being a pop kid like Graham Coxon, and in love with the ferociously messy, layered sound of kids in love with Jonathan Richman and rock'n'roll, you will of course want to rush out and buy this – fuck dude, 'Read About Seymour!', the brash Buzzcocks' rip-off on 'Another Song!', 'Midget Submarines'! If, however, you were wondering where Thurston Moore fits into all this (and it's partly via his collaborations with Maps drummer, the sadly departed Epic Soundtracks) then check out *Jane From Occupied Europe* (Polystar) to see the influence Krautrock *could* have had on UK pop if only musicians weren't so po-faced.

It's great too.

There's a new **Nagisa Ni Te** album out, *Dream Sounds* on Jagjaguwar. (Another one!) Everything I wrote in *Plan B 0.5* about their euphoric Japanese folk-pop still holds true. Speaking of which... try to find **Magoo's** upbeat, keyboard-led double CD mini-album *Popsongs* (May Go Zero). One song is a cover of Guided By Voices' 'Chicken Blows' and if you wanna take that as a reference, fine.

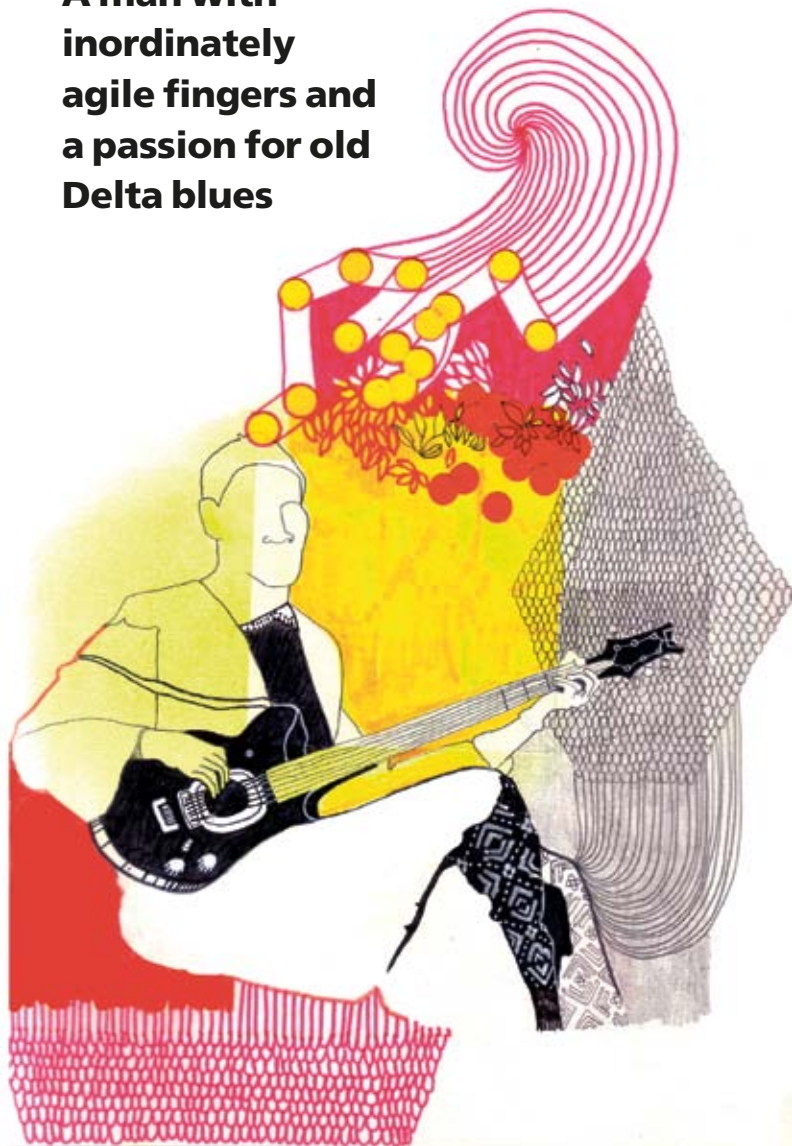
Finally, if I use J Richman and Suicide as touchstones in my attempt to describe former Some Velvet Sidewalk singer **Al Larsen's** graphic, childish and ultimately moving semi-spoken word dialogue *The Hardline According To Danny And The Dinosaur* (www.propertyistheft.com), forgive me. He's nowhere near as 2-D as that implies: Al has a fire, verve and *imagination* all of his own: check 'Portland Vibe' that takes you on a wide-eyed tour through the city. Produced by another Northwest perennial, Steve Fisk, Al is Olympia WA's best-kept secret. Honest.

red, green and blues

Words: Daniel Trilling

Illustration: Hennie Haworth

**A man with
inordinately
agile fingers and
a passion for old
Delta blues**



Ali Farka Touré

Red And Green (World Circuit)

Mali, once home to an ancient empire, straddles the divide between European, African and Arabic cultures. As a result, it has one of the world's strongest and longest-lasting musical traditions. Ali Farka Touré is a blues guitarist who lays claim to this heritage and more.

He was 'discovered' by Western musicians at the start of the Nineties and hailed as the missing link between African and black American music, due to an uncanny similarity between his sound and that of guitarists such as John Lee Hooker or Lightning Hopkins. Ex-Captain Beefheart guitarist Ry Cooder hopped over to Mali to record an album with Ali (1994's *Talking Timbuktu*), eventually winning the pair a Grammy for their efforts. Lazy journalists wrote about having uncovered the true roots of rock'n'roll, but they couldn't have been more wrong.

What they'd found was a man with inordinately agile fingers and a passion for old Delta blues records. *Red And Green* is a two-CD collection of songs Ali wrote and recorded during the Eighties, composed of sparse and exquisitely played guitar accompanied by a clicking calabash and Ali's lone voice. It's clear he cares as much for American music as he does for traditional Mali styles. The opening notes of 'La Drogue', which kicks off the *Red* CD, seem to be consciously based around the 'My Girl' bassline, setting the tone for the rest of the album. Half-recognisable themes are repeated to an almost trance-like degree without ever straying too far from a familiar structure.

Stripped of the homogenising arrangements that sweetened up later albums, *Red And Green* is blessed with a wonderfully abrasive quality that makes you listen all the more intently. Strings are attacked furiously, while Ali's voice switches between howls and intimate crooning. Unless you're fluent in Bambara, you won't understand what he's singing, but comprehension of the words is about as necessary as it was to convey the emotion in Kurt Cobain's strained and mumbled syllables. And if you really want to know, there's a translated lyric sheet that contains all the usual tales of love and death.

A lie: blues is all about roots. A primitive music, bringing us closer to some eternal past we've lost touch with in our technological nightmare – a way of tracing our complex age back to its simple past in Africa, cradle of humanity. What it does represent, if you must, is the same jostling of shared and separate experiences that run through us all. But that's not important.

Don't pick up this record if you want to get in touch with your roots. You'll find nothing more than a man blessed with lightning fast fingers, an expansive record collection and an ear for a killer hook. Someone who plays for the joy of skating over those grace notes at just the right moment. Someone who plays the same lopsided arpeggio again and again until you forget where it began. Someone who has created a style that is at once earthy and ethereal. But you don't have to worry about that.

All you have to do is listen.

Various

Volga Select Presents So Young But So Cold: Underground French Music 1977-1983 (Tigersushi)

Deep-frozen synths, asceticism and existential dread... in retrospect it's hardly surprising that the post-punk aesthetic should have appealed to the culture responsible for *ennui* and Jean-Paul Sartre. But this collection of freshly unearthed (exquisite) corpses of early electronics, a lingering pause over a fleeting moment in musical history, shows how lightly this trench coat of despond was worn on the other side of the Channel (in contrast with Britain's stone-faced, Euromanticising dandys of misery).

Beneath the froideur lurk self-awareness and dry humour: Nini Raviolette's 'Suis-je normale?' is a naive, questioning love song rendered sinister by shrill synth bleeps and a blank vocal delivery; Stranglers bassist JJ Burnel casts himself as a pan-European superhuman in 'Euroman'; and The (Hypothetical) Prophets' 'Person to Person' quotes unsettling fragments from personal ads ('Looks no object/It's your soul I want').

Equally fascinating is how the novelty of the style freed these groups to make heroic leaps into the musical future: the collection – lovingly compiled by ace electro producers Volga Select (Ivan Smagghe and Marc Collin) – veers from warped synth punk (Kas Product's title track) through motorik grooves (Mathématiques Modernes) to Italo-disco drama (Jacno's 'Triangle'); The Droids' *Star Wars* tribute 'The Force (Part 1)'; proto-techno (Bernard Szainer's psychedelic tour-de-force 'Welcome (To Deathrow)'), and ambient drones (writer/philosopher Richard Pinhas's doom-laden epic 'Iceland').

Robin Wilks

Ted Leo And The Pharmacists

Shake The Sheets (Lookout)

Ted Leo continues to carry the plight of the Western liberalism on his shoulders, expressing political philosophy and personal anecdote with disco-punk and trouble-pop.

Leo has always possessed a soulman's voice, like Sam Cooke fronting the Clash, or an agit-era Elvis Costello fronting Blondie. The contrast of serious messages within his playful guitar lines and upbeat rhythms genuinely touches the spirit of Motown: protest music with soul.

Last release, *Hearts Of Oak*, resisted the temptation towards politics; now, Leo's tackling it full-on: "That look on your face – don't let it go to waste/Take it to the floor of Congress/Look into the Core of Rotten."

Jonathan Falcone

Low

The Great Destroyer (Rough Trade)

It's the end of the road. Seven albums down the line and Low have ridden their boxcar out from under leaden Midwestern skies to some depot in California. They've finally reached

the horizon. For *The Great Destroyer* is an album in which a band confronts the inevitability of endings – of full stops and limits – and in confronting these limits, have confounded them.

Take 'When I Go Deaf', in which Alan Sparhawk reflects on the end of his career – "And I'll stop writing songs/Stop scratching out lines" or in the ruminative 'Death Of A Salesman' where, forgetting all his songs, he burns his guitar "in a rage". It's an album of fire and brimstone, from the serrated synths underpinning 'Monkey' to the overwhelming instant when the guitars in 'When I Go Deaf' engulf the track completely.

We're also served sun-dappled pop – the first single 'California' or the jangly 'Just Stand Back' – and, of course, there's still the trademark vocal interplay between Sparhawk and Mimi Park, notably on the glorious tape warble treble of 'Cue The Strings'. But it's the anger that hits hardest here. *The Great Destroyer* is some death rattle.

Natalie Moore

Midnight Movies

Midnight Movies

(Emperor Norton/Rykodisc)

Iconic images merge into less distinct spaces. The geo and the socio speak to each other in subtle tongues. Worlds collide, but the end result isn't catastrophic. An almost inevitable endzone in hearing this band: a studio recording will earn them far less credit than they deserve. Listen to the record, then watch them live before you seal your opinion. Don't let it rest on the album. They will take time to make their reputation, but will make it nonetheless. Get there early.

Stewart Gardiner

Negativland

Helter Stupid (SST)

Never trust Negativland. This is a re-release of their album that examined the media's response to them linking their music with a murder case. Except they had made it all up: the press ran stories without checking the facts, letting Negativland have their conceptual cake and eat it.

At the time it was groundbreaking audio-collage work. Compared to the cut-up-as-history-lesson of *Raiding the 20th Century* by Strictly Kev, it appears almost naïve, but Negativland have always revelled in the complexity of the modern world and *Helter Stupid* is an artefact from a time when simply recontextualising a news-reader's voice begat an illicit thrill. A timely reminder of the media's duplicity and incompetence.

Kieron Gillen

Pedestrian

Volume One: UnIndian Songs

(Anticon)

The Anticon label abounds with innovative dissenters perverting the nature of hip hop to their own advantage. Thriving on the margins of hip hop; the Anticon stamp excites certain expectations. Pedestrian does not fulfil them. He wants to tell us that words, written, are generic. That he raps to keep his words alive. Yet his peripheral poetry sits more comfortably in the folds of the typewritten sleeve than it does crowded by beats and obscured by samples.

Beth Capper

Six Organs Of Admittance School Of The Flower (Drag City)

Opening with a discordant skrang!, a low, thunderous rumble and a seriously extended, clattering drum roll from free-jazzer Chris Corsano, Ben Chasny is out to make a point: "I play guitar in the heaviest, most psyched-out rock band on the planet – I am not a fucking folk musician!"

Then, as the Sturm fades and the gentle licks and hushed vocals drift in, we have to wonder if the gentle man doth protest too much. Or perhaps not. Chasny's time in the ion drive with Comets on Fire is clearly seeping into his solo work: *School Of The Flower* is as close to a full-blown rock monster as the nu-folk family has yet produced.

This is Six Organs' first proper studio recording and, while the production is significantly crisper than on previous releases, it gets pretty raw at times. The delicate acoustic loops of

the 13-minute title track, inspired by John Cale and Terry Riley's bass-and-organ blitzkrieg *Church of Anthrax*, are underpinned by some fierce, screeching guitar, belligerent drums and angry drones that, at times, engulf the entire track. Elsewhere it's Six Organs business as unusual: free-flowing lyrical acoustication, offset by intermittent subterranean hums, warm tape loop buzz and gentle vocal howls.

If less self-consciously spooky than the likes of *Dust And Chimes* and *Dark Noontide*, *School Of The Flower* is still a haunting piece of work whose flickering twangs, drones and sighs – and yes, whirling drums and electrifying guitar solos – will stay with you long after your eardrums stop reverberating to their presence.

Sorry Mr Chasny, you can holler all you like, but you've made another beautiful album.

Mark Pilkington

in bloom

Words: **Jennifer Maerz**

Illustration: **Zoie38**

I think I'm a late blooming stoner. Which has little to do with smoking pot – an escape hatch I dropped through at an early age when the aroma of booze was too dead a giveaway for the parents – I mean the music. In my high school days, future dropouts with names like Louie (who were pack-a-day-smokers at age 12 and sported tank tops that exposed pit hair long enough to braid) listened to heavy music that took them places so foreign their eyes glassed over and their mouths were crooked in perma-grins.

That sound, whatever the fuck it was (I was into local Portland, Oregon indie rock at the time, I had no clue) seemed bigger than I could wrap my suburban head around, even with narcotics.

Now I walk to work with an iPod tuned to Hawkwind and Sleep, the rough, sludgy riffs sawing into my brain. The proto stoner rock and its descendants are a potent mainstay of mine, even as my tastes veer into the smack-ya-like-a-747 electro thrust of more recent buzz bands like Death From Above and Dead Combo. Really, I just want to be levelled to that state of glassy eyed oblivion, whoever's holding the hammer.

Take **25 Suaves**. This spastic Michigan two-piece is helmed by Mr. Velocity Hopkins, (aka Mr Pete Larson), who runs Bulb Records. Bulb is responsible for some of the rawest rawk/noise/lo-fi shit-it-out-on-guitar-and-commit-it-to-tape madness in the US. From early Andrew WK through Japanese garage-compactors the King Brothers, psych merchants Oneida, and noise activators Wolf Eyes and Force Field, Larson knows how to scald the skin off your 'lobes. So, through absorbing so much loud shit, it's obvious the guy – and his wife/drummer DJ Party Time – is going to have a personal music output equally potent to his roster. And really, why fuck around when you can name your latest record *I Want It Loud*, and then create something so volume-heavy that a performance at a school for the deaf would require earplugs. Together with Dave Sahjidak from the Melvins on bass, 25 Suaves loosen organs you didn't know existed, kicking out massive riffs that Larson yells over like Lemmy re-imagined as a skinny noise punk addict.

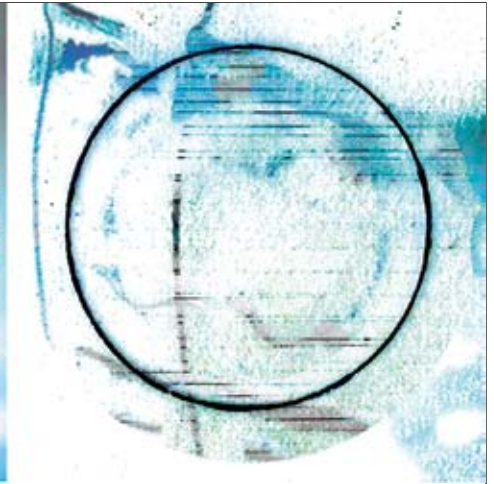
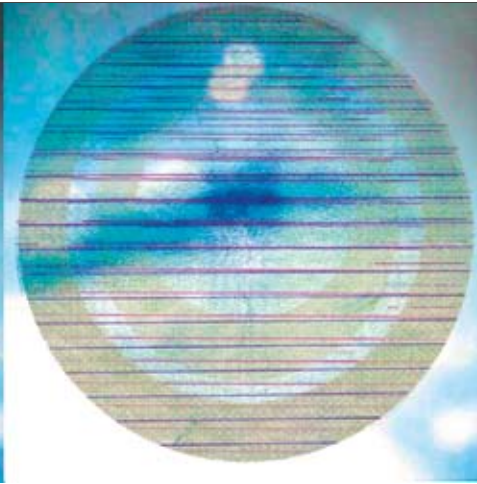
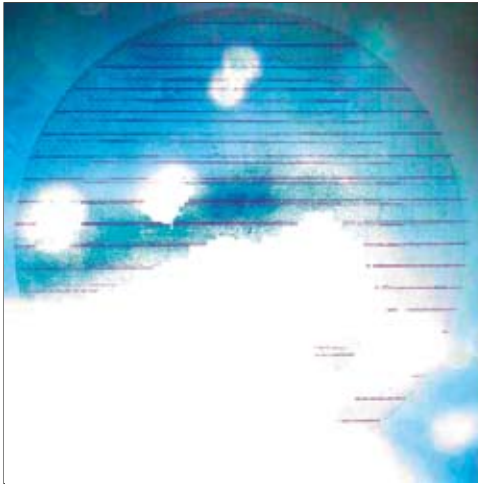
Or take **Burmese**, a San Francisco quartet that sounds like a lumbering, robotic giant losing limbs by the footstep while a quicksand of sludge sucks it further into the earth. Their latest on Load Records is called *Men* and it features tracks like 'Rapewar' and 'Thumbsucker', two bombs of atomic noise and razing riff repetition that are as violent as they sound innocent (or as violent as they sound violent). A tour with Wolf Eyes would decimate clubs around the world and cause frustrated sound guys to claw out their own eyes.

But there's also the softer side of being stoner music. The playful, frolicking fairies in the meadow side. The, well,

25 Suaves loosen organs you didn't know existed

gentle side, which you can hear floating in on the yellow submarine with **Jennifer Gentle's** new CD, *Valende*. This Italian duo – both of whom are male and neither of which is named Jennifer – took their moniker from a Pink Floyd lyric and their music from Syd Barrett, opening every song up into a kaleidoscope of instrumentation, from toys and glockenspiels to antique equipment over which they sing in helium tones. Their sleepy-eyed aesthetic is as mischievous (the cartoonish 'Nothing Makes Sense') as it is soothing (the acoustic bliss and angelic coos of 'Golden Drawings'), like a cult you can't help but join, even if the robes fit a little funky.





new forms

Words: **Doug Mosurock**
Illustration: **Gina Baber**

Arthur Russell

World Of Echo (Audika)

It's been mentioned that the existence of aliens is far too predicated on the concept of what is "alien" unto itself; some believe that alien life forms and terrains might be so foreign to our untrained eyes that we would never be able to see them. This is our surface, our reality; we are limited in our ability to alter it without the aid of technology or pharmaceuticals.

You have seen a science textbook earlier in your life showing photos taken with an electron microscope, indicating a surface that, with the proper equipment, you've never seen before – cells, germs, insects. These beings inhabit the same world as us, writ impossibly large.

It's with that understanding that you must approach *World Of Echo*, 2004's third reissue of material by the late Arthur Russell, an artist whose work could not be confined to any one

sphere of influence or technique. The material presented on this 1986 album (reissued here with bonus tracks and an accompanying DVD) stands apart from all of Russell's earthly achievements. It's the monolith; it doesn't defy comparison so much as it doesn't warrant any. In as simple a manner as could be conceived, Russell forged

What he accomplishes here will make you feel like an ant walking across the surface of a scoop of ice cream

poetic pop songs that contain enormous soundscapes within and around them; gravitational pull as intimacy, science as emotion.

As a musician, producer, and composer, Russell probably spent some time devising the concept for *World Of Echo*. It's too late to ask him, but we can bask in the closeness of the elements here – no more than cello, his milky falsetto, electronic

effects and the warmth of tape hiss, and his own understanding of melody, modulation, and the rhythm that can be made solely from these parts. What he accomplishes here will make you feel like an ant walking across the surface of a scoop of ice-cream, seeing a new landscape for the first time and feeling it change around you. Wear headphones and you will get lost within the massive structure and dense layers of melody and noise, with a fuzzy yet distinct separation between the two. The accompanying DVD features two short films by Phill Niblock of Russell in performance that understand and reinforce the enormity and proximity of the music within.

Arthur Russell saw and heard a reality we could not perceive or prepare for. *World Of Echo* is the key to discovering that reality, the secret of his works, and, possibly, a new way of listening altogether.

To say it's anything less than essential for anyone interested in the warmth of sound and human emotion is a fallacy. To accept it as one of the underheard sonic masterpieces of the last 30 years is your next move.

Archer Prewitt

Wilderness (Thrill Jockey)

On this immaculate collection Prewitt writes, strums, sings and keeps his hair combed straight. He retreats into the wilderness, seeks answers, troubles over loss and in the end it all washes over us like a luxurious Milky Way gliding through Chicago on a

deceptively soft breeze. What is not said in Prewitt's writing is perfectly articulated through the music. A splendid array of instruments squeeze into the studio (mellotron, stylophone, bells, organ, trumpet, cello, sax, trombone), but the parts never crowd each other. Prewitt evokes the old Postcard bands, lining the rhythms

with extraordinary lyricism. A pedal steel guitar, towards the end, strings together a lovely necklace of sorrows.

The well-groomed production reflects the man himself: a clean cut expert specialising in lush suavity. The only troublesome aspect is it sometimes sounds like Al Stewart's *Year Of The Cat*.

Shane Moritz

Psapp

Tiger, My Friend (Arable)

This is the kind of sublime analogue electronica collage I've dreamed about for years; a place where adventurous and eccentric sounds come and cuddle up to Soft Pop vocals under melancholic winter skies. Psapp are Broadcast in an ice hotel, wrapped in faux jaguar jackets, pointing microphones into cracks to record the creaks and drips of living architecture. Psapp are Stereolab on an autumn walk, unearthing strange fungi and gazing at the branches arching overhead. In the far distance the factory bells ring and the smoke belches. More than anything though, Psapp are Psapp: the sound of deliciously fun, often fragile and lovelorn, glitch infected folk music for (sub)urbanites.

Alistair Fitchett

Phthalocyanine

No One Said You Didn't (Planet Mu)

What is this monster doing to music? Does he realise you shouldn't be able to make such noise and get away with it? Does he realise

it's brilliant? Phthalocyanine obviously has no respect for musical formats, period. This is good. He takes the rock steady beat of classic house, the wiggling vines of acid techno and higher ended twiddles of electronica and pours them down your eyes. He pumps out squirming pulses before flooding these sand grain mosaics with bleached synth waves that come as the briefest of aural reliefs before the return to regimented neck jerking at 399980898 bpm.

Phthalocyanine proves that IDM doesn't have to mean chilled or fractured toy ticks. It can be both, for a second, and then it can be something completely different.

Jonathan Falcone

Rilo Kiley

More Adventurous (Brute/Beaute/Warners)

"And the talking leads to touching/Then the touching leads to sex/And then there is no mystery left." Jenny Lewis was born to make boys with a certain kind of asymmetrical fringe wet. Hell, even we nearly instantaneously masturbated when *More Adventurous* slotted into the first stereo it laid eyes on. Okay, so we didn't, but here's the point: Rilo Kiley are way sexier than any of the other Saddle Creek alumni – especially Conor O-friggin'-berst. And that's because this is no ordinary indie-emo, more piano 'n' strings-seduced guitar pop with the sensibilities of Tchaikovsky. Even where emotional investigations become more than

Various

Camping Compilation (Bpitch Control)

These are good people. People who know how to make things echo and squelch just so. People who will obsess over ring modulators and MSP patches so you can have your own private fairground. People like Finnish DJ and producer Kiki, whose 'Luv Sikk' effortlessly whirrs and clicks into life at the start of this retrospective, announcing a clattering merry-go-round of beats and bumps.

Over the past five years, Bpitch Control has reminded us that electronic music should be enjoyed, not fetishised by bearded boys in grey t-shirts. *Camping Compilation* is the Berlin-based label's 101st release and provides an opportunity to celebrate some of the most innovative and more importantly, *fun*, house and techno in existence.

As Sascha Funke's Bros-sampling 'When Will I Be Famous?' evidences, Bpitch don't let notions of taste stand in the way of a good hook, while elsewhere, label owner Ellen Allien and Paul Kalkbrenner provide enough grit to keep whey-faced urbanites interested. Even the ubiquitous Miss Kittin gets a look in, via Smash TV's remix of 'What About Me'.

This is music that has no practical purpose. It doesn't help you deal with a messy break-up. It doesn't inspire revolutionary zeal. All it does is make you want to wave your arms about, perhaps even jump up and down a little. And grin.

See that purple-green haze pouring out of the speakers all over your carpet? That's pleasure, that is. Hop in.

Daniel Trilling

a little hackneyed, there's always enough dramatic climaxes and gushing sentiments to liquidise sceptics. And with that purest sounding confessional wonderment, Ms Lewis' mailbag will be swelling dangerously real soon. Don't be fooled though, loserkids. She'd eat you for fucking breakfast.

Adam Anonymous

Sage Francis

A Healthy Distrust (Epitaph)

Sage Francis is waging a war on a world where art is stagnant and politics is corrupt. Where the buck is always passed, apathy runs amok, responsibilities are shunned. Francis points the metaphorical finger with belligerent eloquence, purloining revolutionary rhyme for the purpose. "When I say hip, you say shut the fuck up, you ain't saying shit," rages Francis, parodying the frivolity of commercial rap and reclaiming music from the flippancy of the industry dollar. Sage Francis' healthy distrust is coupled with a healthy amount of hostility in a world where democracy favours a gun-slinging, illiterate alcoholic on the basis of idol worship.

Beth Capper

Sightings

Arrived In Gold (Load)

All post-rock signified was indie-rockers growing jazz goatees, when it should have been all about carving rock's tombstone. This is where Load Records take up the hammer and chisel, boasting a rich seam of artists intent on reducing the rock form to smoking ruins.

New York's Sightings is one such outfit. A two-man unit, they harness bass guitar and drums in the pursuit of what, at first, is little more than eerie abstraction. But in the world of Sightings, time runs in reverse and rhythms slowly form out of the mist of entropy: 'Internal Compass' is where Liars might end up, should they venture any deeper into the woods, and by 'Dudes' they're embroiled in some Dionysian whirl of feedback – a Teenage Jesus and the Jerks tripping on peyote, dervish-whirling, their flesh cut to ribbons on brambles.

Louis Pattison

Ana da Silva

Lighthouse (Chicks On Speed)

Appropriately for something touched by the Day-Glo irony-mittened claw of Chicks On Speed (it's cool, it doesn't *sound* like them), the ex-Raincoat's solo offering will elicit some polarised responses. The vocals waver and strain one minute, coalesce into complex harmony the next. The keyboards go from raw incompetence to sudden sophistication in seconds. Da Silva's lyrics are heartfelt but strangely lumpy, shoehorned to fit into the gentle, homespun disco backing – then they explode gently into real poetry.

Is she as naive as she seems; are these glimmers of perfection happy accidents? How much this matters is your own, very complex, affair. Me, I can't decide. Some days *Lighthouse* is like those lame American nu-knitting books, all self-conscious 'reclaimed' handicraft; others, it reminds me of digging in a pile of folorn, smelly clothes at a boot sale and unearthing a fully functioning Rosedale chord organ for a pound. The difference?

I guess I'll listen till I work it out.

Frances May Morgan



quit or continue

Words: **kicking_k**

Illustration: **Frances Castle**

Various Artists

Shockout (Tigerbeat6)

Being the rad fusion of Jamaica's bitching cauldron and Tigerbeat6's geek chic/anery, *Shockout* is the first blast from a label of the same name and, who knows, perhaps a future subgenre of a musical style. The website says: "Crossbreeding our own forms of dance and electronic music with the rawest elements of ragga, jungle, dub and sound system culture." Which is to say, songs in the key of AaIIIEE. It's hot as hell: experimentalist technicians from Kid606 to The Bug to Team Shadetek and DJ/Rupture queued up on the playlist to put their MCs thru the mincer. The MCs don't go without a fight, either. Check He-Man's growl

on 'Killer', swaggering like the final baddie in some over-18s horrorcore console game. You just lost yr last life, and he's dancing on the 'Quit or Continue' screen: "Me a killah/Sleep wid de big gun undah me pillah..." Eight Frozen Modules and Wayne Lonesome's 'Dem Nuh Know Me' made me write this:

Chasing this rhythm track, I'm hunting butterflies with bare hands

"Beats are ADD-driven, excessive, eccentric, schizophrenic – all those things that we all know beats can't literally be. But give me some latitude here, 'cause chasing this rhythm track, I'm hunting butterflies with bare hands. The regular lode of the chorus; the hammer clicks of auto-fills; the junglist moment at 2:31 when there's a sudden cardiac surge, a panicky ascent, the reverberating

electro timpani, phasing around the long, blissful fade at the end. Such are the brilliant splinters of this record, a soundclash spectacular that never plays safe, never lets the listener breathe easy, but surges on again, redoubles its energy, kicks when down. Going back to that horrorcore-console-game metaphor,

let's imagine the producers as programmers, hunched over monitors, eyes blinky asterisks, muttering: 'Let's see them get through this.' D'n'b beats become hungry zombies. Glitch cuts are sadistic circular-saw traps. And the MCs and musicians are game-playing machos honing pixel-perfect timing. Quit or Continue? It's up to you – but this record will beat you every time.

Soft Pink Truth

Do You Want New Wave Or Do You Want The Soft Pink Truth? (Tigerbeat6)

Last year saw a number of ironic punk cover albums, including *Nouvelle Vague* with its one-liner joke aesthetics (New Wave = Bossa Nova = Nouvelle Vague). But from Drew Daniel's side project, you expect a more surreal, sick, sense of humour, or at least some rat torturing. Not one to disappoint, Daniel cleverly reworks Eighties hardcore punk classics like Minor Threat's 'Out Of Step' into a ridiculously bizarre glitch-house hybrid, and L Voag of the Homosexuals 'Kitchen' into a domestic appliances disco sleaze-fest. This is everything that the Bush administration's

army of pro-life hypocrites hates: it's gay, black, sexual and intellectual. In other words, disco-punk is to contemporary America what west coast hardcore punk was to the Reagan era. So, yeah, definitely, we want the Soft Pink Truth.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv

Suicide

A Way Of Life / Live At TheTown And Country Club '87 (Mute) Why Be Blue / Live At Le Palace Paris 17th April 1989 (Mute)

Suicide lay down beats in the same manner that less resourceful people dole out idle threats. Each and every track on *A Way Of Life* is an amphetamine-fuelled soundtrack

to Argento's darkest dreams. You can hear the slice of blades through the New York air: a cold and silent murder reel to Suicide's bloodbath. Live (on the 1987 CD), Suicide are monstrous, dark-shaded beasts. Listen intravenously, with the lights out, and your heart switched off.

Why Be Blue, Suicide's fourth album, has 'rapture' rap, sugary niceties and synthesizers that swoop from speaker to speaker like a bad chat-up line. 1988: The Year Punk Got Botoxed. Thankfully, the live CD has all the industrial dirt and dirge you could wish for, including a teasing 'Johnny', a murderous 'Rock Train' and rock'n'roll riffs bubbling under the bloodflow.

Hayley Avron



wolf! the musical

Words: **Gracelette**

Illustration: **Andrew Clare**

Patrick Wolf

Wind In The Wires (Tomlab)

It's a turducken. That's what this record is. You like roast turkey, natch. But how to convey your increased pleasure on learning there's a chicken and a duck squeezed inside, without slating the plain old turkey? Or, more accurately, how to say you'd prefer the duck *sans* turducken, without implying you're unwilling to plough through turkey and chicken in order to get to the duck? Were it not for 'Tristan' (the duck), I'd be cooing appreciatively over *Wind In The Wires*. Instead, I rave about that one song, before having to explain that the rest is good – just not as good.

See, this roving laptop folkster's second album is all electronic folk whimsy polished with hefty production values, equal parts West End musical, high drama costume disco, and unlikely Top 10 hits – think Seal's 'Kiss From A Rose' and Bryan Adams' 'Heaven' for starters. And it's hard to get past the stasis of this production perfection. Even as I gleefully picture the brocade corsetry and ridiculous Georgian wigs that would surely accompany any dancefloor rendition of the string-filled opener, 'The Libertine', or the smouldering 'Teignmouth', the lo-fi glitches are too smooth, too seamless and too damn efficient. There's no ragged hook, no vulnerable flaw, no real way to penetrate or be penetrated by this music.

And I'd subtitle these theatrical songs *Should I Stay Or Should I Go? Songs From The Musical*, but that would imply even the flimsiest unifying narrative. Instead, this is Patrick raiding 12 Lloyd Webber musicals for that moment when the protagonist is assailed by conflicting impulses – to go a-wandering or to settle down? It's the same song performed in 12 different ways. Devoid of any context, background or interrogation into this conflict, it's reduced to an arbitrary theme, through which he explores the backwater fairy tales and also-ran folk songs of this cold and rainy landmass. They are good songs, populating my city-bound

Who wouldn't want the angel boy to end up fronting a sexed-up Spandau Ballet?

imagination with romantic journeys across bleak, grey deserted Cornish coastlines. But between the impermeable music and decontextualised lyrics, this is less a compelling album to force you out the door, and more a sonic bubble bath of escapism.

Except for 'Tristan'. Oh, 'Tristan'! Track 11 gives me visions, I swear. I see pyrotechnics. I see wind machines. I see the disembodied

head of Patrick Wolf floating around archive footage of the Giant's Causeway. This is like Peter Pan throwing Billy Idol "waaaaow!!!!"s on a mid-Eighties binge of sex and drugs and you-know-what. So push some shirt sleeves midway up that boy's forearms and get him on old-school MTV because tonight little Patrick Wolf reinvents himself as glam-rock sex god.

Now, I liked Old Patrick of debut album *Lycanthropy*. I raved for weeks after seeing him live for the first time. Looking like a cross between Glenn Close and John Malkovich in *Dangerous Liaisons*, the young viola player seemed to be crowd-surfing on sheer exuberance alone.

But check out New Patrick – the travelling songs of *Lycanthropy*'s asexual little-boy-lost remade into hedonistic body groans and slippery, grinding bass as he howls his vampish way through 'Tristan': "*I am fucked and I am fucking too! My name is Tristan and I am alive! Uh! Uh! Uh!*" It will surely be 2005's stage tune of choice for any self-respecting stripper; herein lies proof positive that sounding like Marilyn Manson circa *Mechanical Animals* and Bang Tango circa *Psycho Café* is a wonderful thing. He may come wrapped in highly polished chicken and turkey, but who *wouldn't* want the angel boy to end up fronting a sexed-up Spandau Ballet? Always believe, yanno? That one song is more vibrant, compelling and indestructible than the rest of the album combined, and it's well worth the wait. But maybe less of the turcken next time?

Sway

This Is My Promo Vol 1 (Dcypha)

Equally at home with the grime and UK hip hop scenes, Sway Dasafa thrillingly fuses the energy of the former with the reflectivity of the latter. "*I can't diss someone's mum when I don't know what their house situation's like*": words some of the E3 massive could take to heart. This mixtape is fresh, endlessly quotable, and frequently hilarious: tales of CCJs, Hornsey hijinks, and top up town swanking. 'Pepsi' sharply reworks J-Kwon's 'Topsy' into a Wood Green house party sketch; 'Month In The Summer' glides on *Blueprint* – swish strings; and the title track butchers comparisons to Dizzee and Eminem in two incisive verses.

Throughout, Sway's too damn giggly fresh to resist. Investigate.

Chris Ballard

T

T (Herzfeld)

On his first album, *B-Category Film*, French songwriter T regularly talked about the school playground with his fears and anguish totally intact. Never had the wall between the schoolyard and the psychiatric ward been this thin. Never had France been so close to fucked-up Americana. Since *B-Category Film*, T has obviously left his isolated home village of Goetzenbruck and discovered manners: this is not hi-fi yet, but lo-fi with elegance and forms. If the influences remain strictly American, they have evolved from the most primitive form of rural songwriting to a sophisticated transcription of melancholy that owes more to the agitated tranquillity of some of Neil Young or Low's finest songs, than to the one-chord-on-a-broken-guitar squalid scribbling of most lo-fi bonsai songwriters.

This is electronica, but only by default. Because great guitarists or Glockenspiel players are probably hard to find in the Vosges Mountains, T still plays around with boot-sale computers and Salvation Army keyboards. And how frustrating it must be to keep great songs such as 'Anna' or 'Pink & Red' in poverty. Life's a bitch, when you're born in Goetzenbruck, and a pretty destitute bitch at that.

www.hrzd.com

JD Beauvallet

Various

Anti-War Anarcho-Punk Compilation Vol 1 (Overground)

Benjamin Franklin said the only certainties in life are death and taxes. And, sadly, one pays for the other. That a collection of bands from 20 years ago can still have relevance in the new millennium is also, in one way, sad.

Culled from a series of demos, seven-inch singles and wow-flutter destructured tapes from the scene in its 1980–1984 heyday, these pieces may not have eloquence of delivery (there's more lost notes here than a lifetime of Kerouac), but there's a fire of spirit that burns through the ages. From Astronauts' proto-Auteurs 'Typically English Day' to the more dingy output of Zounds, Flowers In The Dustbin or The A-Heads' self-conscious gothery, there's tragedy herein (in any sense of the word). It's not easy listening, but then such punk-passion proselytising/preaching to the perverted (depending on your standpoint), was certainly never meant to be.

Joe Shooman

Various

Antologia de Musica Electrónica Portuguesa (Tomlab/Plancton)

Anthologies of academy-approved electronic music often tend toward the fusty, closed-off and overly conceptual, as often its score- or concept-based production ignores the sheer voluptuousness and romance of sound itself.

Not so with the artists collected on this anthology of Portuguese experimentation. Drawing from a three-decade history, Rafael Toral compiles short pieces and excerpts from a host of underappreciated pioneers (unearthing previously unreleased snippets from the great Nuno Canavaro), finding common threads between the composers' works: textural and compositional bravery, chance operations dissected with academic fervour, systems gone haywire. A clutch of humming, vibrating works toward the middle of the set are particularly lovely, with Telectu and Jorge Peixinho scoring elegant sheets of drone that are densely populated with arcane presences.

Jon Dale

The Wrens

The Meadowlands (Lo-Max/Absolutely Kosher)

How do you *do* that? How do you develop the shimmering psych-pop keyboards and blue jean guitars of *Silver*, your Pixies/Beach Boys-influenced 1994 debut, to produce the delicious Wrens house style of *Secaucus*? Then, dropped by Grass Records in 1996, how do you wait a further seven years before releasing *The Meadowlands*, a near-perfect record of such expansive scope, editorial tightness and musical precision, that it's like David Fincher's speed-editing the sprawling soundtrack to your lives?

How do you produce the crunchiest guitar sounds ever in 'Everyone Choose Sides'? How do you invent heartbroken lyrics that stink of such reality in 'She Sends Kisses' and 'Thirteen Grand'? How are you such bitches to your listeners (abrupt endings and disrupted indie rock conventions), while making us so grateful for that dark, sincere and self-deprecating humour?

How do four New Jersey boys, suddenly middle-aged after decades of day job commuting, still make music that demands we jump about, riding the exhilaration of your refusal to be ground down? And, more importantly, how do I convince everyone reading to go buy your goddamn masterpiece?

Gracelette

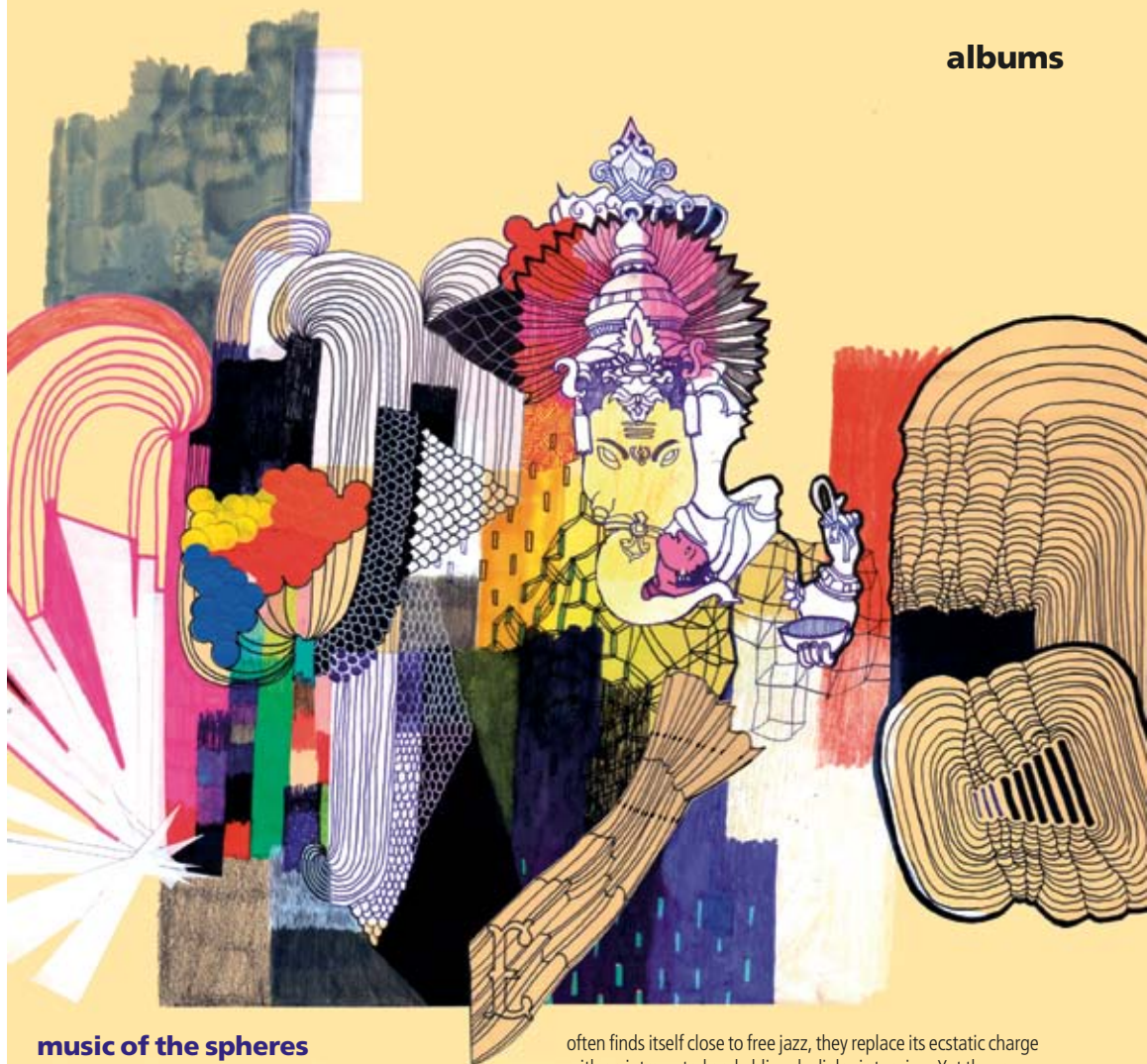
Yellotone

Tar File Junction (Ai)

With the dangerously-monikered 'Gail Force Porter Lou Carpenter', Yellotone announces his fibrous intentions: to meld piano, stand-up bass, jazz 'n' bust beats and ludicrous L/R stereo-panning; to slide scrapes and jolts together with melodic ease and construct an LP which has the words 'cool' and 'slo-mo-smug' written all over it.

Tar File Junction is a compelling experience: the product of bad TV, a quality record collection and an artist straining to shape a slab of schizo-soul. It may be true that there's nothing new under the sun. Thankfully, though, nobody on earth can ever hope to capture and label the multitude of subtle shades its rays cast.

Joe Shooman



music of the spheres

Words: Jon Dale

Illustration: Hennie Haworth

The Eclipse Records label and mail-order, run by benevolent Ed Hardy from the unremarkable town of Bullhead City in Arizona, is the most important hub of cultural dissemination for underground music. The Eclipse aesthetic is well-turned and focuses on outsider craft from across the world — improvised forms, free jazz, skewed folk and pop, extrapolated rock music, minimalist composition, sound art and chance meetings all collected under the one banner. The label's releases, almost all vinyl, are lovely artefacts documenting Hardy's personal obsessions. Their latest batch of releases is among some of the hottest scoop available in either hemisphere, a small set of new spirit guide formations.

Sun City Girls' latest double album for Eclipse, *Fresh Kill Of A Cape Hunting Dog/Def In Italy* is a bowdlerised reissue of two of the band's mid-Eighties Cloaven label cassettes, and the content is as confusing and borderline-slapstick as previous titles in the series. The cumulative effect of hearing this music is to have two suspicions confirmed: one, that the Sun City Girls are the antic masters of the American sub-underground, and two, that the band only really took off in the early Nineties, with their *Torch Of The Mystics* and *Kaliflower* albums. But this double set contains a few revelations, like the dog-eared and crabby improvisations that make up half of *Cape Hunting Dog*, and a fair few moments of genuine hilarity: witness the 'edited highlights' of audience banter on *Def In Italy*, where one audience chants "YOU SUCK" in riotous tandem, complete with a ridiculous cross-edit to a snoring Sun City Girl (who sounds as though his false teeth are stuck in his gullet.) It's the cover versions that are the most ridiculous, whether they blast Santana's 'Black Magic Woman' through a mile-high wall of noise, slur and mumble forgotten lyrics to 'Spirit In The Sky', mope their way through a desultory acoustic 'Dark Star', or the *pièce de résistance*, an absolutely immolated take on Morricone's lead theme to *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly*.

Freedom can lead you directly to 'other planes of where', if you pitch your tent high enough. You may want to ask Finnish ensemble **Päivänsäde** for salient details. *Puhalluspelto* is their first vinyl release, following a limited double cassette and a CD-R. Unlike a lot of 'free music' from Finland which clutters the *mise-en-scene* with stray remnants of rock instrumentation and volume, Päivänsäde's music takes a more gestured approach, with structures and whole genres hinted at but never 'completed'. While the amorphous outfit

often finds itself close to free jazz, they replace its ecstatic charge with an introverted and obliquely dialogic tension. Yet they are not austere, unlike so much 'improvisation'. The result brings Päivänsäde closest to the more open of performances from Muhal Richard Abrams, or the Art Ensemble Of Chicago, full of tinkling bells, humming accordions, and springy, queasy strings. The best cuts on *Puhalluspelto* drop loosely interconnected sound events into puddles of silence. This approach confers a certain intimacy upon the music. When Päivänsäde play together, they can work up a head of steam (as on the brassy 'Lempi Karkaa Pihasta'), but what's most striking is the way the band enact a democratisation of every sound, allowing tiny instruments such as tinkling percussion and toys the same space as thumped drums and warbled recorders.

Sharing a sense of submersion and sideways stratagem is the first widely available **Taurpis Tula** release, *Sparrows*. These duet recordings, from Heather Leigh (once of Charalambides) and David Keenan (*Wire* contributor and leader of the Telstar Ponies), are streams of channelled energy, absolutely direct and unmediated. Keenan's fondness for the breathless atmospherics of acts as disparate as Mirror, Loren Connors and the New Blockaders

shines through in his love of muffled, murky sound, and when he snaps loops into place, they manage to be absolutely transparent in their construction yet they appear so mysteriously placed as to confound received wisdom of the loop function.

But it's Leigh's vocals that really elevate the record: peeling back any linguistics from vocalisation, she sends beams from her vocal cords, emitting a pure light that's as entrancing as her collaborator Christina Madonia and as sustained and sustaining as Pauline Oliveros' effected accordion. The duo repeatedly send thick reams of instrumental smoke rising from their instruments. Playing in a small, airless room, as one assumes they do, the cumulative effect of said smoke ghosts the improvisations on the album, with each piece seemingly carved from one eternal recording session, black clouds of fog and hiss accreting throughout. By the end, the guitar sounds as elemental and chimera-like as Keiji Haino's *Nijumusu* set. No mean feat and no small praise. At the end of the day though, Taurpis Tula's art is absolutely, uncompromisingly *their own*.

The audience chants 'YOU SUCK' in riotous tandem

media



I wasn't there for the onscreen boners

Traditionally, sex scenes tend to focus on the chick's reactions to what's being done, allowing the male viewer to imagine he's the one in the driving seat. We'll see over the bloke's shoulder to the girl's orgasming face, for example. (Porn, of course, takes this to its logical conclusion by cutting everything but the bloke's cock out of the frame.) I'd hoped that, in *9 Songs*, what with more of the male sexual reaction and response visible onscreen than ever before, the camera's gaze might also be revolutionary, exploring both girl and boy as sexual objects.

But the focus, as ever, was on the female: her mouth, her ass, her orgasms. In the scene when he dominates her, the camera zooms in on her face as she's coming. In the scene when she dominates him, the camera zooms in on his face as – oh no, wait, it doesn't. It pulls wide so we can admire her sexy form in spiky boots walking on his chest. Bo-RING. *9 Songs* may show more than we've been shown before, but it shows it in exactly the same way.

Miss AMP

Because the nine songs of the title are all crap (normally I'd rather chew glass than have to listen to Black Rebel Motorcycle Club), but it doesn't matter a single bit. Because I bet it started off as a laugh, a pub dare that, like the best daydreams, Michael Winterbottom decided to run with rather than shaking his head at the next morning.

Because, face it, it is porn, or could be used as porn, but it doesn't have Kenny G saxophony on the soundtrack, and also makes you desperate to keep on watching right to its sad, sad ending rather than pausing for a series of jiz breaks. Because it starts with Kieran O'Brien – yes, from *Gruey* – flying over Antarctica in Biggles glasses, making the vast polar wastes look like a new, ravaged map of the heart rather than a playground for Tory teen-boys to plant their Union Jacks. Because it doesn't ask us to give a damn about either of the characters, but is truthful enough for us to be able to see us bits of ourselves in their tiny, clotted, self-enclosed world. Because it's an autopsy of a spent relationship as haunted as 'ABBA On The Jukebox' by Trembling Blue Stars: "*Her swinging on a tyre/Me taking her picture*". And because it has the most romantic exchange ever heard in a film:

"I'm going to brush my teeth."

"You should do. You stink."

I'll love it forever.

Sukhdev Sandhu

Michael Winterbottom's latest adventure in DV realism, *9 Songs*, offers the memory of a love affair through a bare but explicit mix of sex, gigs and icebergs. The memory is the male character's; we asked two women and two men how they saw it.

The meagre storyline, the stilted dialogue, the skimpy characters, the close ups, the changing positions, the S&M lite, the repetitiveness: all very porno. Something director Michael Winterbottom's literary inspiration, Michel Houellebecq, aspires to. But this film sets its sights above such affected alienation and anomie. Its sex-fest is aesthetic – and then there are those end-of-the-affair aerial shots of icebergs breaking up. *9 Songs* wants to be a supersensual, flesh-and-beats love story. Thing is, it's got a problem with intimacy.

Best line: "Antarctica is like two people in a bed, claustrophobia and agoraphobia in the same place." Holed up in that dark little flat with two strangers, I felt the claustrophobia. Since we know nothing about this couple and meet no one beyond their sticky sex cocoon, while I'm watching I feel and think nothing – except hasn't she got a *looong* neck? And skinny chest? And isn't he well endowed, and was that why he agreed to the role? Finally, even these inane observations dry up and, like the Giacometti chick with the queer American accent, I've had enough fucking and want to go home.

This movie tries to get inside lovers' bodies rather than their heads – to evoke the visceral connection that comes through sex and music. But even if its stars go to the gigs and get it on, we're always stuck outside, watching. *9 Songs* does it standing up and it does it lying down but it doesn't do it for me.

Liese Spencer

I really wanted to like *9 Songs* – *In This World* and all that – but... There's that hideous Michael Nyman drone. The shadowy cinematography, too self-consciously poeticised. And the Antarctic

scenes are just a feeble excuse for bad poetry and grandstanding lines. The film tries to articulate something interesting and important about the ways we project our desires – onto a landscape, a band, a lover's body – but it never comes into focus, never coheres.

The only scene where I felt emotional connection was when Matt (Kieran O'Brien) was watching Lisa (Margot Stilley) masturbate with a dildo. Perfect, devastating poignancy – it's worth seeing the film for that alone. Stilley's an incredible find; a magnetic, unpredictable life-force. Matt could be a Winterbottom surrogate in that scene, watching someone he can't fully comprehend or control. Stilley almost eludes the film's grasp, the stifling confines of those endless sex scenes. I'd love to see her in a different dramatic context.

Maybe Winterbottom's making too many films too fast. *Code 46*'s script felt underdeveloped. There's a similarly hurried feel to *9 Songs*. That snatched quality worked perfectly for *In This World*, but maybe he needs to spend more time planning out his material on other projects. Godard or Fassbinder tossed out films like confetti, but Winterbottom isn't in that league – at least not yet.

Kieron Corless

I mean, obviously you're not going to be able to crack one out over this film, but who needs to crack one out over a film when there's the internet? I wasn't there for the onscreen boners. I seen them before. I was there to see a whole new way of viewing sex, one which explores both their bodies, a camera that's pansexual in its gaze. That's what I'd decided: *9 Songs* was gonna be different.

film: inner visions

Words: SF Said

A Thai tiger, burning bright in *Tropical Malady*

Tropical Malady starts out as a lovely, cool, off-kilter romance – and ends like *Apocalypse Now* on Mogadon. In between, there's a shamanic ghost story, set in the jungle, full of spirits, talking monkeys and a truly majestic tiger.

"What the fuck was that?" I screamed at Sukhdev, after we saw it at Cannes. Neither of us had seen anything like this film before. We strode the streets, manic, unable to stop talking about it. Many of our fellow film journalists were suspicious. They're always going on about originality, but when the real thing shows up, they get scared. So most of them just gave us wary, pitying looks. We didn't care. We felt like the Ready Brek kids, all lit up from inside by this beautiful UFO of a movie.

The glow hadn't worn off next morning – it still hasn't – so I tracked down writer-director Apichatpong Weerasethakul, from Thailand. His country's produced some unusual films lately – *Tears Of The Black Tiger*, *Last Life In The Universe*, and Weerasethakul's debut, *Blissfully Yours* – but this one is something else.

Everyone's freaked out by your film.

"People either love it or hate it. I always thought the film was very simple, though. It's not so shocking."

Is everything on screen meant to be real?

"It's real but not real, at the same time. It's like a dream."

The film seems to enter a parallel world. Do you believe in a spirit realm that we can access?

"Yes, yes, I definitely believe. I've had two experiences of ghosts. One was in a hotel in Paris. I saw a woman standing there, and then she

disappeared – just disappeared. So that was 100 per cent a ghost. And once in Thailand, a ghost I didn't see passed through me. It was an air-conditioned room, so no wind or anything could get through, but there was this sound – woo-woooooo – like a very strange dog howling, coming closer to my house – wooooooooo. And then I smelled this presence, but the curtain's not moving and there's no wind and my hair has goosebumps. And then it passes right through me."

How about the talking monkey in the film?

"Er, talking monkey is talking monkey. Nothing big behind it... I think the film is about a character learning to communicate. He has to step into another world, and the rules of that world are different. So a monkey speaking is a way of showing that he starts to understand."

And the tiger?

"The beast within us has been suppressed by society. We are further and further away from our animal inside. We cannot express it. That's a malady."

Is it easy to get this kind of film financed?

"Very difficult. I write personal stories about my own



'Once in Thailand, a ghost I didn't see passed through me'

experiences, but when it comes to a script, people don't understand."

What are you doing next?

"I'm writing a science fiction movie. It's about a spirit who follows the man she loved, through many centuries and countries, and finally into outer space."

Head-On (dir Fatih Akin, 120 mins)



A full-frontal celluloid body-slam, Fatih Akin's Turkish-German gelignite of a movie details inter-cultural limbo and longing through a wall-totalled car, two pairs of wrists thrice slashed, sullied sheets and soiled veins, bodies beat and souls heaving. Cahit is 43 and pissed, every which way. Who better a groom for a flighty girl with an itch to scratch? Sibel wants him, not least as cover from her trad Turkish family, and so she pitches him her broken nose and great tits, and how she wants to dance and live and fuck.

But he has marital skeletons he isn't sharing; she spends their wedding night with the local barman. Another evening she leaves her old man on the dance floor. "Cahit, I'm going to get laid! Did you see the guy?" Inspiring – but perhaps untenable, at least when rival loves, broken bottles and jurisprudence tangle. (If you're after a glassing in Turkish Hamburg, try: "I want to fuck your Turk the Greek way.")

Akin mounts an intuitive bull-charge through this story, only stumbling over the more wearied experiences of compromise, loss and regret. The actors, too, mix it up unaffectedly; as Sibel, Sibel Kekilli rips into a real role after past platforms such as *Teeny Exzesse 68* and *Junge Debutantinnen 19* – old exploits the German tabloids fell upon with glee. "If you can't change the world, change your world," Cahit is tipped; *Head-On* manifests what a struggle that can be, even with all the spunk in the world.

Nick Bradshaw

La Niña Santa (The Holy Girl) (dir Lucrecia Martel, 106 mins)



Popular assumptions about Latin American cinema still tend to tally neatly with the *Rough Guide* romanticism of the gap-year tourist. Burnished, landscape photography; salsa music; beaming peasants; perhaps a matinee-idol turn from Gael García Bernal. The brittle, intimate

visions of Argentinian writer-director Lucrecia Martel, then, register as an anomaly. Martel's films are sulky, delicate, internal. She dissects moods and relationships with surgical precision, and has a consummate eye for quietly revelatory visual compositions. She's also very funny.

La Niña Santa is Martel's second feature. Like her debut, *La Ciénaga* (*The Swamp*), it's set in a decaying bourgeois holiday resort. A medical conference is taking place. Divorced hotelier Helena pursues shy Dr Jano – but he's more drawn to her sullen, watchful 16-year-old daughter, Amalia, who is deep in a bout of sexually charged teenage religious fervour.

Awkward juxtapositions provide the irregular pulse of the film. "You can't confuse the ugly and the beautiful; or that which brings wonder with that which horrifies," states Amalia's Bible-study teacher – but she's proved wrong. Boundaries blur between health and sickness, virtue and transgression, good and evil. Hearing is unreliable; bodies rebel.

This is a film of beautifully judged poetic resonances, but one that never feels forced or calculated. And if neither adolescent sexuality nor Catholic guilt is exactly virgin territory, Martel offers up both with rare subtlety and humour. Hannah McGill

round-up some more stuff worth seeing

2046

Wong Kar-Wai's magnificent riff on love, loss and memory. It stands alone, but works best when seen with his earlier films. Try it in a quadruple bill (at least) with *Days Of Being Wild*, *Chungking Express* and *In The Mood For Love*.

5X2

The story of a relationship, told in reverse: from divorce, through wedding, back to first kiss. Latest from François Ozon (*Sitcom*), former enfant terrible of French cinema.

Duck Season

Fernando Eimbcke's debut is like *The Breakfast Club* remade by Jim Jarmusch in Mexico City. Two 14-year-old boys obsessed with their joysticks, the girl next door, and a pizza delivery man who dreams of breeding parrots.

Somersault

Teenage girl makes a pass at her mum's boyfriend, runs away from home, plunges headlong into a series of messy, confusing, sometimes beautiful encounters. Brilliant first feature from Australia's Cate Shortland.

Tarnation

Jonathan Caouette's experimental iMovie of his dysfunctional life – home videos, answerphone messages, moments of pop-culture transcendence.

Textures Of Reality: Animating The Unconscious

An eye-popping programme of worldly and psychic missives from a great sweep of animators, let loose at the National Film Theatre in early February.

The Wild Bunch: American Cinema 1967-1980

A monumental season continues throughout February at London's NFT: 52 movies, from *Bonnie And Clyde* to *Heaven's Gate*.

The Woodsman

Kevin Bacon delivers a taut, testing study of a paroled paedophile in Nicole Kassell's admirably level psychodrama.

filmmaker's dispatch: Wal-mart of sound

Words: Jem Cohen



Music in movies usually tells you way too much about what is happening, or is about to happen, and how you're supposed to feel about it. Viewer as dog, music as leash. As I sunk into the edit on *Chain*, I realised I just couldn't have a lot of music in the film. Still, like almost all my projects, it's guided by music, lost without it, even if this time it's music you don't necessarily hear.

Chain is a close-up look at the lives of a Japanese businesswoman and a young drifter trying to navigate a world of malls, generic hotels, highways, theme parks and franchise stores. The film is about spending time with these women, but the last thing I wanted to do was tell viewers what to feel about them, that is, to *betray* them. And that's what music probably would have done.

The movie's opening section is a different story. Here, I somehow needed the *sound* of global finance moving in unstoppable waves, of some impending, unnamed calamity, not the sound of the disaster, but of the *barrelling* towards it. I wanted you to wait for a crash that doesn't come except in slow motion, over the next 97 minutes.

That's where Godspeed You! Black Emperor came in. For years I'd made films to project in their live shows, and felt that we were coming at some of the same ideas from different directions. Working with the band and engineer Howard Bilerman, I isolated a fragment from their album, *Yanqui UXO*. Starting from a bit of violin that sounded to

The sound of global finance moving in unstoppable waves

me like a siren, I wondered what it would be like to magnify that simple fragment, dividing the nine-member band into sections and having each pick it up and expand/explode it in overlapping, insane sequence. It became the crucial opening for *Chain*.

Another pivotal sound came from The Silver Mt Zion Memorial Orchestra & Tra-la-la Band With Choir album, *"This Is Our Punk-Rock," Thee Rusted Satellites Gather + Sing*. Like *Chain*, the record is an elegy of sorts. As they worked on their record and we did our sessions, an enormous, 'big-box' chain store went up outside; wiping out a big piece of the land. The track I excerpted from was 'Goodbye Desolate Railyard'. No accident, and the perfect sound: a reaching shimmer of tones and intertwining frequencies – natural, unnatural, spiralling endless...

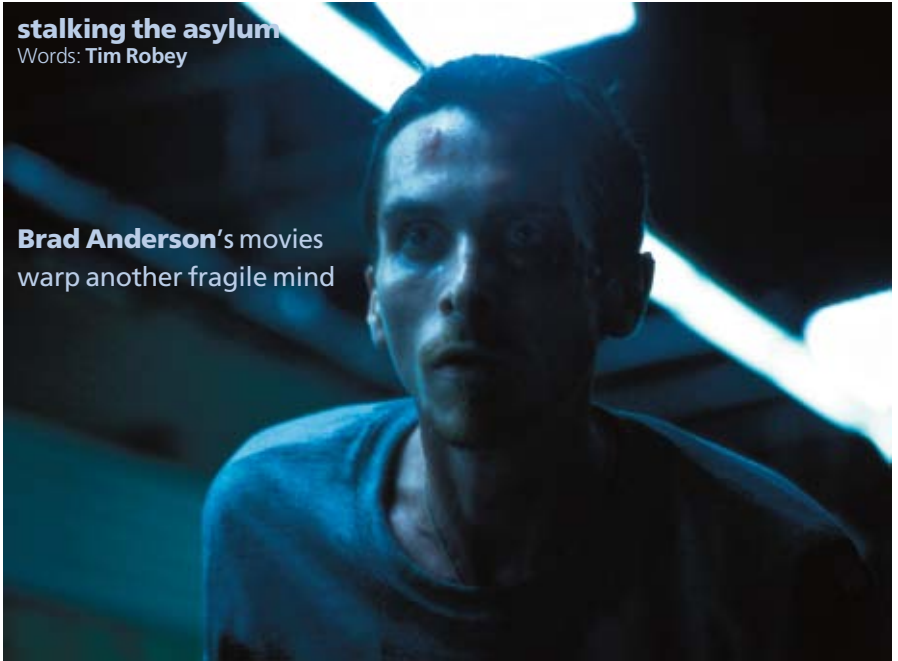
Music also shaped my casting. When looking for a non-actor lead for the film, my 'executive' producers Ian MacKaye and Guy Picciotto (of Fugazi) led me to Mira Billotte, singer in the underground bands Quixotic and White Magic. It was the hidden strength in Mira's singing that convinced me she was right for the film. And of course, another river of music runs just under the film's surface. It's the ghost of early American folk – some of the most regional music ever made, for a movie about the absolute erasure of regional character.

Jem Cohen's films include *Lost Book Found*, *Instrument* and *Benjamin Smoke*

stalking the asylum

Words: Tim Robey

Brad Anderson's movies warp another fragile mind



A weirdly accented lady at the mental institution down the road gave us directions. She probably shouldn't have. NO TRESPASSING signs awaited emphatically at the top of the hill, as did the 125-year-old red-brick building I'd come to stalk. As I plunged into the undergrowth, my travel companion waited in the 4x4, looking bemused.

Spreading its wings like some huge bat across the landscape north of Boston, this forbidding, disused pile was the Danvers State Insane Asylum, and I'd seen it before: it was the setting for Brad Anderson's eerie 2001 cult chiller *Session 9*. Ever since stumbling across the movie, in which it's close to a character in its own right, I'd been obsessed with the place. But I hadn't gone so far as to, well, trespass.

It's boarded up now, but as I prowled around in the fading light, it's the sense of macabre history that grips my imagination. Danvers was built in 1878 under the watchful eye of psychiatrist and architect Thomas Story Kirkbride – a name and job

The Machinist in a smelly New York screening room. I think the Christian Bale character must have given me ideas: he spends much of the movie hanging round a retro-styled airport departure-lounge for no good reason, except that it might just be an external manifestation of his crippled subconscious.

The scariest sight here is Bale's physique. He lost some 63 pounds to play sleep-deprived industrial worker Trevor Reznik, and it's not as though he was lardy to start with. The first time he appears in profile, inescapably conjuring images of Auschwitz, your jaw fairly drops, and Anderson uses the shock value of his transformation throughout as a distressingly tactile reminder of the paranoia and guilt eating Reznik up from within.

This subjective horror territory has brought out a striking talent in Anderson. It's an ability to locate psychic trauma in visual environments, whether we're talking about Bale's hollowed-out ribcage

I half expect Baoht Z'uqqa-Mogg, The Bringer of Pestilence, to be lurking round the next corner

combination creepy enough in the abstract, let alone looming right up in your face. It was also the model for HP Lovecraft's *Arkham Asylum*.

So I half expect Baoht Z'uqqa-Mogg, The Bringer of Pestilence, to be lurking round the next corner, tentacles akimbo. Instead I get a couple of fat security guards with truncheons. "Oh, you're from ENGLAND," they slowly work out, which seems ample justification for me to be breaking state law on some morbid and borderline-dissociative fanboy whim. Humouring my camped-up eccentricity with shakes of the head, they point to some creaky wooden stairs which I scurry down to get the hell out of there.

Rewind by about a week. I'm watching Brad Anderson's new psychological thriller

or the tormented, echoing shell of Danvers. Both Bale and *Session 9*'s Peter Mullan find themselves stalking their own consciences, wandering around ornate psychological mazes of their own creation.

And the movies keep beckoning you to join them. I've seen *Session 9* six times. Danvers Asylum sits on that hill, screaming in silence. And Christian Bale needs to start looking over his shoulder.

comics



2 Sisters
Matt Kindt (Top Shelf)

You want pen-guns and cyanide teeth? You got 'em. You want buried treasure and mysterious rockets? A cinch. You want secrets and romance? No problem. They're all in these gripping 330+ pages in which Matt Kindt (co-creator of the ace *Pistolwhip Noir Crime* comics) weaves three tales, pulled together in a sensational and subtly surreal conclusion that will have you scratching your head with a 'where the hell did THAT come from' expression on your face, before you flick back to the beginning and plunge right in all over again. So it's just as well that, like all the best spy stories, *2 Sisters* bears up to repeat readings.

It reminds me of parts of Dylan Horrocks' masterful *Hicksville*: many stretches of pages devoid of text, with the insistence that you really read the images and pore over them like the clues they are. It's a highly rewarding experience because, even though Kindt's art is loose, it's never simplistic. Expressionistic without being overwrought (a hard balance to achieve), the pages unravel like a classic Noir movie; heavy shadows casting ominous suggestions of encroaching menace.

Kindt too plays neat games with time, which means that *2 Sisters* is a playful postmodern romp darts back and forth through time to great effect, making subtle connections as it goes. With this book, Kindt has undertaken as challenging a mission as the one encountered by his characters. His success is complete.

www.topshelfcomix.com

Alistair Fitchett



Gum
Matilda Tristram

The note that accompanies Matilda Tristram's *Gum* says, rather quaintly, "I'm afraid it's rather rude". She's not wrong, for throughout these handmade concertina pages explodes a cornucopia of bubblegum sexual congress (literally). Like *Suckle* meets *Sixties Acid* poster graphics, *Gum* is pure comics Pop Porn with a delicious sense of humour. I'll never again be able to look at a bubblegum vending machine without blushing.

www.lovelycat.co.uk

Alistair Fitchett

**Cricket Stubble #1:
Five O'Clock Shadow**
Bill Roberts

The first in a series of comics by south London artist Bill Roberts follows a young man's commute between Central London and one of the capital's faceless satellites. While his train moves through the successive architectural blunders which ring the city, his travelling companions remain as unknowable as the far-off tower blocks. As the young man progresses through his decaying surroundings, the keenly observed illustrations bring to life the local weirdoes who pepper the area. Yet despite their mutterings, they appear to hold the answer to this existence that so bemuses the protagonist. *Five O'Clock Shadow* is a wry, perceptive glance at a world that is slowly and serenely drifting apart.

www.kissmymintcondition.co.uk

Daniel Trilling



brave new fictions

Jonathan Falcone has words with **Matt Howarth**

As an academic teen cursed with sporting ability, I spent a lot of time by myself. Or at least with the spindled images of Matt Howarth.

My Howarth love affair started with The Residents' *Freak Show* album, a limited number of which came with a comic. Howarth's images accompanied the story of 'Jelly Jack The Boneless Boy', a formless flesh-lump who was kept in a glass jar. The Residents' music had always made me laugh; accompanied by Howarth's bold lines and wobbly curves I fell to tears. Their trumpet blasts and flanged vocals now seemed like trembling symphonies giving tragic shade to Jack's existence.

Whereas the all-encompassing sense of another reality rocked my world, the idea of multi-sensory mediums was something Howarth had utilised for years. His first published pieces were album reviews written as comic strips. Further experimentations followed.

"Back in the early Nineties I released a few cassette tapes of music recorded by some of my comic characters," Howarth explains. "The music was done by real musicians, whose identities are secret."

Howarth's musical incorporation sent me reeling for his comics. Savage Henry with his inter-galactic crime fighting and record collecting, Those Annoying Post Bros and their experiences with bands like Can, Wire and Hawkwind.

"Once a musician spurns the love-song milieu they're going to be drawn to certain visual influences, and speculative fiction is a tasty lure for the imagination. I like science fiction, so I tend to go for music that sounds spacey or cosmic. Strange music has always played a crucial role for me as

'I released a few cassette tapes of music recorded by my comic characters'

a source of inspiration, and it seemed obvious to blur the boundaries between my work and that music."

Howarth puts out graphic novels as CDRs with accompanying music and, more recently, as Internet downloads. Despite having worked with endless musicians to significant acclaim, he never leaves the fringes.

"There's a wholly non-economic side to this. Human tastes vary, and just because something is not commercially successful doesn't imply it has no audience. On the other hand, niche markets cannot expect to reap massive financial success."

"This is no bad thing – struggling to change the tastes of everyone is a ridiculous ambition and somewhat totalitarian at that. Freedom of choice allows a person to develop their own tastes; they shouldn't be condemned for exhibiting narrow preferences. Still, without struggling artists there would be no new trends or expansion of creativity."

www.matthowarth.com

The first 20 subscribers will also receive copies of the Detroit Cobras' classic first two albums, *Mink Rat Rabbit* and *Life Love And Leaving*, recently reissued through Rough Trade Records

subscribe



"The Detroit Cobras look and sound like a Sixties motorbike gang. What's keeping them alive out there is what remains trapped in the stones and the streets, the psychogeography of a city that was once the epicentre of American pop music. Like their more recent forebears Big Chief, Mule and The Dirtbombs, the Cobras are wired into the sounds that built Motor City and the transformative effects they still have.

"To call them a covers band is a disservice. Because the Cobras are providing you with the best musical history lesson, pointing you in the direction of a lost continent of r'n'b and soul. Forgotten gems by the likes of Andre Williams, Betty Wright and Professor Longhair have shown the Cobras how to fashion music with a dirty great soul. Like alchemists, they mix alcohol with the spirits that swirl in the Detroit air, to create the greatest jukebox on earth. Singer Rachael Nagy, guitarists Mary Restropo and Steve Nawarra, bassist Joe Mazzola and drummer Kenny Tundrick prove that not only do they know how to pick a good tune, they know exactly what clothes to dress it up in too. Hip to every nuance, they become a different band for each tune, effortlessly popping in and out of different wormholes in time." – Cathi Unsworth, *Plan B*

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Plan B Issue 3

Magnetic Fields, LCD Soundsystem, The Mae Shi, TV On The Radio, John Peel, RTX, The Ex,

Jandek, Avenue D, Nick Cave, UK Hip Hop, Scatter, Bearsuit



Careless Talk Costs Lives Issue 1

The Gossip, Peaches, The Gin Palace, PW Long, Belle &

Sebastian, Lesbo Pig, Kid Koala, Danielson Famile, Junior Boys



Careless Talk Costs Lives Issue 4

Detroit Cobras, Oneida, Sole, Har Mar Superstar, Dirty Three,

Turbonegro, The Go-Betweens, The Hunches, Manitoba, Numbers



Careless Talk Costs Lives Issue 7

The Kills, Dillinger Escape Plan, Part Chimp, Boom Bip &

Dose One, Valerie, Liars, Mudhoney, Marc Almond, Barry Adamson



Careless Talk Costs Lives Issue 11

The Dirtbombs, Yoko Ono, Aereogramme, Mark Lanegan, Oneida,

The Pattern, Princess Superstar, Lift To Experience, Lambchop



Plan B Issue 0.5

Joanna Newsom, The 5678s, Shystie, Comets On Fire, Jack Rose & VHF Records, Marine

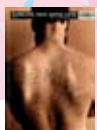
Girls, Can, Ian Svenonius, The Bug, Le Tigre



Careless Talk Costs Lives Issue 2

Young People, Slumber Party, The White Stripes, Tim Kerr, M

Ward, Scout Niblett, Cat Power, Kid 606, The Slits



Careless Talk Costs Lives Issue 5

Will Oldham, Daniel Johnston, Scout Niblett, Cat On Form, Crass,

Buck 65, Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Dirtbombs, Electric Six



Careless Talk Costs Lives Issue 9

Yeah Yeah Yeahs, The Bellrays, Kevin Rowland, Sonic Youth, Richard Hell,

Lee Hazlewood, The Gossip, The Breeders, El-P, Kawabata Makoto



Careless Talk Costs Lives Issue 12

Mogwai, Banned Records, Beat Happening, The State

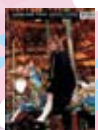
of Hip Hop, Electrelane, Le Tigre, Alma Cogan, The Leaf Label, Acid Mothers Temple



Plan B Issue 0

Chicks On Speed, Graham Coxon, The Von Bondies, OOIIO, Electrelane,

Lightning Bolt & Load Records, Kaito, The Pastels, Spektrum



Careless Talk Costs Lives Issue 3

Scout Niblett, James Chance, Dizzee Rascal,

Nina Nastasia, I'm Being Good, Todd, Northern State



Careless Talk Costs Lives Issue 6

Nick Cave, Erase Errata, Cat Power, Ari Up,

Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Kid 606, Graham Coxon, Chikinki



Careless Talk Costs Lives Issue 10

Bright Eyes, Mercury Rev, Hefner, Mclusky,

Giant Sand, ...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead, Oxbow, Jon Spencer Blues Explosion

The next Plan B will be on sale from Monday 4th April, 2005

art

cut out and visit

Daria Martin
Soft Materials



**26.01.05 – 06.03.05 The Showroom,
44 Bonner Road, London E2**

Effortlessly cool on colour-saturated 16mm with a plinky plonky soundtrack, Daria Martin's films, already shortlisted for this year's Becks Award, take the original thrill of discovery and transform it into a series of comic gestures without ever being disrespectful. Her gentle mockery of po-faced Sixties style video dance is a warm and humorous take on high modernist aesthetics. A simple geometry ties together primary hues and bodily postures, marrying the symmetry of the modern with the knowing irony of the now. Her new film for the Showroom Gallery in London is even better because, on top of everything else, it features robots in a man/machine erotic love story.

David Burrows
New Life



**29.01.05 – 24.03.05, Aspex Gallery
27 Brougham Road, Portsmouth PO5**

In Peter Greenaway's 1980 film *The Falls*, a violent unknown event (VUE) affects victims in unpredictable ways. Some instantly acquire new languages, others the conviction that birds "have something to do with it". David Burrows' installation at Aspex, previously shown at London's Chisenhale Gallery, suggests something similar has taken place. Candy-coloured ruins belie the sense of catastrophe, implying that destruction and decadence go hand in hand. A critique of the inevitable failure of media representations of terror, formulated in neon shards of foam and broken toys, this is what a tsunami in Pepperland would leave behind.

tonight, i'm going to be... HK119

Words: Pil and Galia Kollektiv



Art students are compelled to transform themselves into works of art

**Regarding Terror:
The RAF Exhibition**



**29.01.05 – 31.05.05, Kunstwerke,
Auguststr 69 10117 Berlin**

Financed by an eBay auction of pieces by the Chapman Brothers and other contemporary artists after public funding fell through, the Kunstwerke's controversial show brings together art that deals with the Red Army Faction terrorists. A who's who of German artists, from Gerhard Richter to Joseph Beuys, get to grapple with one of the most explosive themes of our times. Politics and aesthetics, direct action and nostalgia, myth and fashion make for the uneasy ingredients in a molotov cocktail of an exhibition that tries to understand, from within, the spectacularly violent critique of the West from without.



Without art schools, the best bands would not exist. Without pop music, contemporary art would be a dead, formal, and institutionalised language. Perhaps, as Simon Frith and Howard Home suggested in their seminal work *Art Into Pop* (still as relevant today as when it first appeared 20 years ago), this is because, "The shock of the new requires that the initiators of movements do indeed exhibit the art school dream of 'working for one's living by living in one's work'". In other words, the total vision of being one step ahead of the crowd compels art students to transform themselves into works of art: to become a Bowie, a Ferry or a McLaren.

Heidi Korpelainen achieved the first with her cover of 'Boys Keep Swinging', but her elaborately costumed performance art spans all three, from high glam to terror-punk. As HK119 she releases her own music together with disco covers of Bowie and T.Rex via Bauhaus' 'Telegram Sam'. She plays live as an ultra glossy Nina Hagen-style Eighties diva. And she creates trashy videos of this exaggerated self-proclaimed popstar working the full range of Klaus Nomi poses and gesticulations.

How did HK119 evolve? Did it really start life as an art school project?

"Kind of. I have been making music for a long time. The images to go with the songs came while I was doing my MA in Fine Art at Central St Martin's.

What is the significance of showing your music videos in an art context? Do you see yourself as a musician, performance artist, video artist, all or neither? Do these definitions mean anything to you?

"All. I am an artist who enjoys making music. I think I would get bored doing just one thing. Recently I have started drawing too. As for definitions – mix them all up!"

Your 'stage persona' has been described as a spoof or a product – what makes her inauthentic?

"I'm not sure what you mean by 'inauthentic'... HK119 is an 'authentic' product..."

Your visual references seem to relate to Eighties new wave style, but you chose to cover two Seventies songs, by Bowie and T.Rex. What are your main influences, musically and artistically?

"For me, the Bowie and T.Rex covers are genuine Eighties covers because that's when I discovered them. I was a huge fan of Bowie, Iggy, Kraftwerk, Grace Jones, X Ray Spex and Finnish Tango... Artistically, Russian Constructivism, Bauhaus and Futurism have all been great sources of inspiration."

Are you working on a full length HK119 album? Any other projects?

"I have enough material for an album already, I am just making more. Some of my videos are in a show in Paris [15.01.05 – 19.02.05 at Galerie Chez Valentin, 9 Rue Saint-Gilles]. Also, a couple of galleries in London want to show my work, so I'm thinking about that. Maybe some gigs too..."



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**Middle-aged men in diaphanous
sequined robes purse ruby-red lips**

heavenly heaving

Words: **Mark Pilkington**

Nat Pwe: Burma's Carnival Of Spirit Soul

Fronted by Alan Bishop of legendary Seattle-based avant-punk exoticists Sun City Girls, the Sublime Frequencies label is dedicated to releasing obscure sights and sounds from the edges of global culture. Their brand of guerrilla ethnography extends the band's DIY aesthetic to audio and video recordings carried out in the field, eschewing interpretation and explanation in favour of raw material.

Their audio CDs, which mix snatches of radio and TV broadcasts with field recordings and local musical product, sound something like a stroll through a bustling street market. This DVD has a similar feel, perhaps because the filmmakers – Bishop, his brother and SCG cohort Richard, and Robert Millis – do actually spend a lot of time walking through heaving markets.

For one week at the end of every August, the Burmese village of Taungbyone is transformed into a spirit-infested labyrinth of singing, dancing, boozing, chain-smoking, money-flinging, cross-dressing, gamelan-bashing madness. A carnival of free self-expression, the festival pays tribute to the Nats, the spirits of historical non-conformists who met untimely, violent or tragic ends. At Nat Pwe these spirits, now numbering 37 (including the chief Nat, Buddha), are channelled by Kadaws, or mediums, who adopt the persona of their chosen Nat and provide the spirit with a temporary physical body while they, or someone else, sings its story to a musical accompaniment. The catch is that only gay

men and women, often cross-dressing, can be Kadaws, making the festival a joyous celebration of the other in Burma's notoriously repressive society.

Lightning-fast percussionists create thunderous gamelan rhythms as Kadaws sway, stagger and twirl in spectacular costumes, and appreciative audiences ply them with booze, fags and cash. Tranced-out, spinning and smiling, middle-aged men wrapped in diaphanous sequined robes purse ruby-red lips, clutching bottles of whisky and several lit cigarettes in each hand as onlookers pin banknotes to their costumes. Intercut with such scenes are glimpses of other festival activities: snake charmers, food and gun stalls, makeshift discos, Nat idols being painted and prepared, and what looks like Burmese Morris dancing.

It's all shot on slightly fuzzy consumer mini-DV, there's no voiceover or commentary of any sort, and the transitions are all jump cuts. But this works to the film's advantage: what we're seeing is largely what the filmmakers saw; though their eye for detail and the focus on the musical aspects of the festival makes this much more than your average holiday video, unless your family happen to be the Sun City Girls. Perhaps paradoxically, the lo-fi nature of the production works to boost its sense of immediacy, our presence only occasionally betrayed by lingering glances from the camera's subjects.

In years to come films like these will be of far greater cultural and historical importance than the selective glosses provided by National Geographic and other well-meaning, but selectively deceptive, populist ethnographic entities.

www.sublimefrequencies.com

Don't Look Back

Dir DA Pennebaker, US, 1967 (Sony, Region 0)



The apparent technique of *Don't Look Back*, a folkumentary covering Bob Dylan's 1965 tour of England, was: shoot everything and cut out the boring bits. It portrays the 23-year-old genius as a snot-nosed punk leaving numerous people's cheese in the wind. Proselytisers, journalists and girlfriends all get it obliquely in the neck as Dylan, who had just released the semi-electric *Bringing It All Back Home* LP, becomes frustrated by life in the pop panopticon.

Pennebaker's commentary confirms that Direct Cinema, the theory of non-intervention that inspired the film, had always been a fiction, and Dylan's manager was especially concerned to create situations for the filmmakers to record. But if the situations are 'staged', their sometimes ugly outcomes are not, and the mounting ill-feeling led directly to Dylan's "long piece of vomit", and definitive break with folk culture, 'Like A Rolling Stone'.

Henry K Miller

dvd

Tristana / Luis Buñuel Box Set 2 (The Discreet Charm Of The Bourgeoisie, The Phantom Of Liberty & That Obscure Object Of Desire)

Dir Luis Buñuel, France/Spain, 1970/72 /74/77 (bfi/Warner, both UK Region 2)



Don Luis' final testaments retain the star casting and suave garb first deployed in *Belle de Jour*; beastly yearnings still lead his characters by the nose, asinine refinements yank them back, but the concession to bourgeois front marks the shift in an otherwise steadfast worldview. Where *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Age d'Or* aggressively chopped their social notables with necromantic ants and suicidal scorpions, and stoked enough sex to leave even the figure of Jesus bent and spent, the sly tracts of Buñuel's latter years prefer the inspection of full-feather-pomped ostriches. Where there are rats, they're caught in designated traps; flies flail only in the most exclusive soup. And sex is a mere maggot of the mind.

Three of the four star Fernando Rey as the unflappable butt of Buñuel's jokes (and his likely alter ego; in his battle with the bourgeoisie, Buñuel certainly knew his target). In *Tristana* he's guardian-cum-seducer of Catherine Deneuve's ice maiden; in *The Discreet Charm Of The Bourgeoisie* the leader of a pack of surreally undernourished would-be gourmets. *The Phantom Of Liberty* folds other new wave arthouse headliners into a gag roll of inversions of social etiquette, but he returns in *That Obscure Object Of Desire* as a fastidious moth of a man, drawn to the flickering flame of a woman who meets his seigniorial advances with constant inconstancy, and comes incarnated by two different actresses.

Nick Bradshaw

It's All About Love/Dogville
Dirs Thomas Vinterberg/Lars von Trier, both Denmark, 2003 (Video Collection/MGM, both UK Region 2)

Vinterberg and Von Trier wrote the Dogme95 manifesto, implemented it in *Festen* and *The Idiots* – and have since watched their stripped-down style being widely, crassly imitated. They've responded by going in different directions.

Von Trier keeps clawing away at artifice. First he deconstructed Bjork in *Dancer In The Dark*; now he out-Brechs Brecht in *Dogville*, a post-modern morality play acted out on a bare soundstage. Everyone's visible; there's nowhere for the actors to hide. Even as Nicole Kidman gets serially raped, the



off the road

Words: Henry K Miller

Retracing **Godard's** left turn from party to Party

Jean-Luc Godard Box Set 2 (Pierrot Le Fou, Made in USA & Prénom Carmen) (Warner) **Vivre sa vie / Masculin Feminin / Two Or Three Things I Know About Her** (Nouveaux Pictures) **Weekend** (Artificial Eye)

The French new wave shaped an image of cinema that still inspires today. It threw out films as inventive, irreverent and self-consciously intellectual as the young men who made them, in which characters acted out movie fantasies in a world where reality and film had become interchangeable. Jean-Luc Godard's reference-heavy films sometimes resemble a smart student's bedroom – Rimbaud on the coffee table, a vintage movie poster on the wall, perhaps even an original bricolage somewhere. If this sounds intimidating, remember that JLG rarely got beyond the contents page of a book. A Bowie-esque magpie-artist, he synthesised elements from wherever whim took him, forging brilliant new wholes, before moving on. The question isn't exactly one of authenticity, but some looks suited this director better than others.

Pierrot le Fou (1965), Godard's agonised farewell to the new wave, is a triumph, somehow improvising a new pop lyricism for its archetypal 'young lovers on the run' story. Here the typically new wave desire to make life as clear, logical, and formal as fiction reveals its tragic aspect amid the impossible deceptions of post-colonial conflict. The making of the film coincided with the escalation of US involvement in Vietnam, and from *Pierrot* until 1967's *Weekend*, which bore the pregnant end-title 'FIN DU CINEMA', Godard's films were dominated by questions of political commitment.

Masculin Feminin (1966) dramatises his dilemma, with new wave icon Jean-Pierre Léaud playing Paul, a young Parisian torn between 'feminine' pop culture, represented by his girlfriend Madeleine, and the 'masculine' political activism of his Communist friend Robert. Now the desire to live in and through movies turns sinister, and in Godard's scheme these 'CHILDREN OF MARX AND COCA-COLA' must choose between political engagement and pleasure.

townsfolk mind their own business. It's a brilliant visual metaphor for the way we're often complicit in suffering, simply by averting our gaze. Yet *Dogville* strikes one false note – the smug voiceover narration – and it leaves the whole film feeling contrived.

Vinterberg's *It's All About Love* is Dogme's polar opposite: a super-stylised sci-fi fantasia, set in a near-future where everything is freezing, even the human heart. People are literally dying for lack of love. In this snowy apocalypse, Joaquin Phoenix and Claire Danes play the last romantic couple, on the run in a world that's lost its way. The film isn't flawless; some of it's pretentious, even laughable. Yet because it wears its artifice on its sleeve, it doesn't matter one bit. *It's All*

About Love feels startlingly sincere – and its fragile beauty brings me out in gooseflesh.

SF Said

Crazy Love
Dir Dominique Deruddere, Belgium, 1987 (Mondo Macabro, Region 0)

The arc of a young man's life is told through three stories about love and sex – or, more accurately, the lack of it – in this modest Belgian masterpiece, a dark, affectionate tale of love, acne and necrophilia.

As a pre-pubescent, Harry is in love with love and watching tawdry melodramas. An older friend attempts to introduce him to the joys of sex, first through a young girl, then the drunken mother of a schoolfriend. Ultimately,

It's enough to put you off revolution for life

Godard himself chose unpleasure, but was not very discerning about where he found it, making overtures towards the Situationist International before falling in with their Maoist arch-foe. He became convinced that breaking completely with Hollywood norms should be his contribution to the anti-imperialist struggle.

A cinematic pincer-attack staged in the summer of 1966, *Made In USA* and *Two Or Three Things I Know About Her* marked the commencement of hostilities, the former questioning the adequacy of the thriller genre to politics, the latter concerned with the limitations of film as such. Dominated by Godard's self-doubting voiceover ("Whatever I say must impose limitations on the world"), *Two Or Three Things* teeters on the brink of implosion.

Paradoxically, Godard's new-found uncertainty towards his means of expression was accompanied by an increasingly strident political world-view. "We can only overcome the horror of the bourgeoisie with even more horror," remarks a character in *Weekend*, an apocalyptic anti-road anti-movie. Against Godard's intentions, it's enough to put you off revolution for life. It was this deliberate alienation of audiences, identified with the need to break with commercial cinema and its conventions, which constituted his failure after 1968. Always intellectually exciting, these films suggest roads not taken towards a popular political cinema. At their best, perhaps despite themselves, they reconcile pleasure and politics

Henry K Miller

the best he can do is a wanking lesson in the back of a junked car. Next we meet Harry at 19, a loner with monstrous acne, as he resorts to extreme measures to get a prom dance. The final part, based on Charles Bukowski's *The Copulating Mermaid Of Venice, CA*, was shot first as a short, but lead actor Josse de Pauw was so impressed with the result he persuaded Deruddere to tell the rest of Harry's story.

Lauded by Coppola and Madonna on its release, *Crazy Love's* downbeat tone and nec-romantic climax doomed it to obscurity. This loving reissue features a dreamily coloured digital transfer, great sound, a making-of documentary and interview with the director.

Mark Pilkington



games

wreck those specs

Words: **Miss AMP**

Illustration: **Raine Lee**

"1-Up is... Adventures in video game culture. A new zine about how and why we play. It's about video games as a way of life, not just a pastime or private addiction. Stories about triumph and defeat, losing quarters, staying up late, and being invincible. Not your little brother's game mag: no cheats, codes, or centrefolds of virtual vixens. We revel in video games as a cultural experience and as art; blinking lights, blip bloop music, and a million ways to approach 'gameplay'."

Readers! Ever read any video games journalism? Kinda sucks, right? It's all dullsville boy-babble about physics engines, specs, polygons and codes, right?

'Tetris can be a way of relating to the world'

Right! But no more! Because punk rock video games journalism is finally here! And this revolution (like all the best revolutions) is being bought to you a) in fanzine format and b) by a girl! Hurrah!

The world's first video games fanzine, *1-Up Magazine* is published in the US by Raina Lee and designed by John Pham. Now on its third issue, past features have included 'How Tetris Saved My Life', 'Arcade Etiquette For Beginners', a feminist reading

of Um Jammer Lammy, a Tony Hawk confessional, and a comic about Game and Watch handhelds, all wrapped up in a delightful bundle of clashing neon silk-screened graphics and Eighties video games typography. We talk codes, polygons and physics engines* with zine founder Raina Lee.

What inspired you to launch *1-Up*?

"I used to work in the video game industry (I did PR and occasionally wrote for the game mags) and I noted a lack of critical voices about the medium: a lack of anything that talked about games as a valuable cultural experience: social aspects of gaming, how there is a culture around gaming experience. Until recently, games writing lacked seriousness, depth, critical thinking, and, especially, a feminist or female perspective. So, using a zine/punk rock philosophy, I decided to make a publication that would have video game culture as its prime content. Currently I publish personal stories, game criticism, comics, art, and ephemera related to video games and its history, as well as interviews with gamers, bands, etc."

Can you talk about the visual aesthetic of *1-Up*?

"The first two issues were hand-stapled and silk-screened, and laborious to make. Issue three is professionally printed – more like a journal or a book – but we still wanted to maintain the handcrafted, intimate quality of previous issues, because the content of *1-Up* is very personal. So we've filled Issue Three with illustrations from a group of very talented illustrators (John Pham, Jordan Crane, Kozyndan), and tried to maintain a handmade quality to the printing; fewer photographs, two-toned printing (inspired by old two-colour Atari game manuals), graph paper, and a lo-fi aesthetic."

You talk about the gaming 'lifestyle'. What are the accoutrements of the lifestyle? Pacman tattoos? A love of 8-bit music?

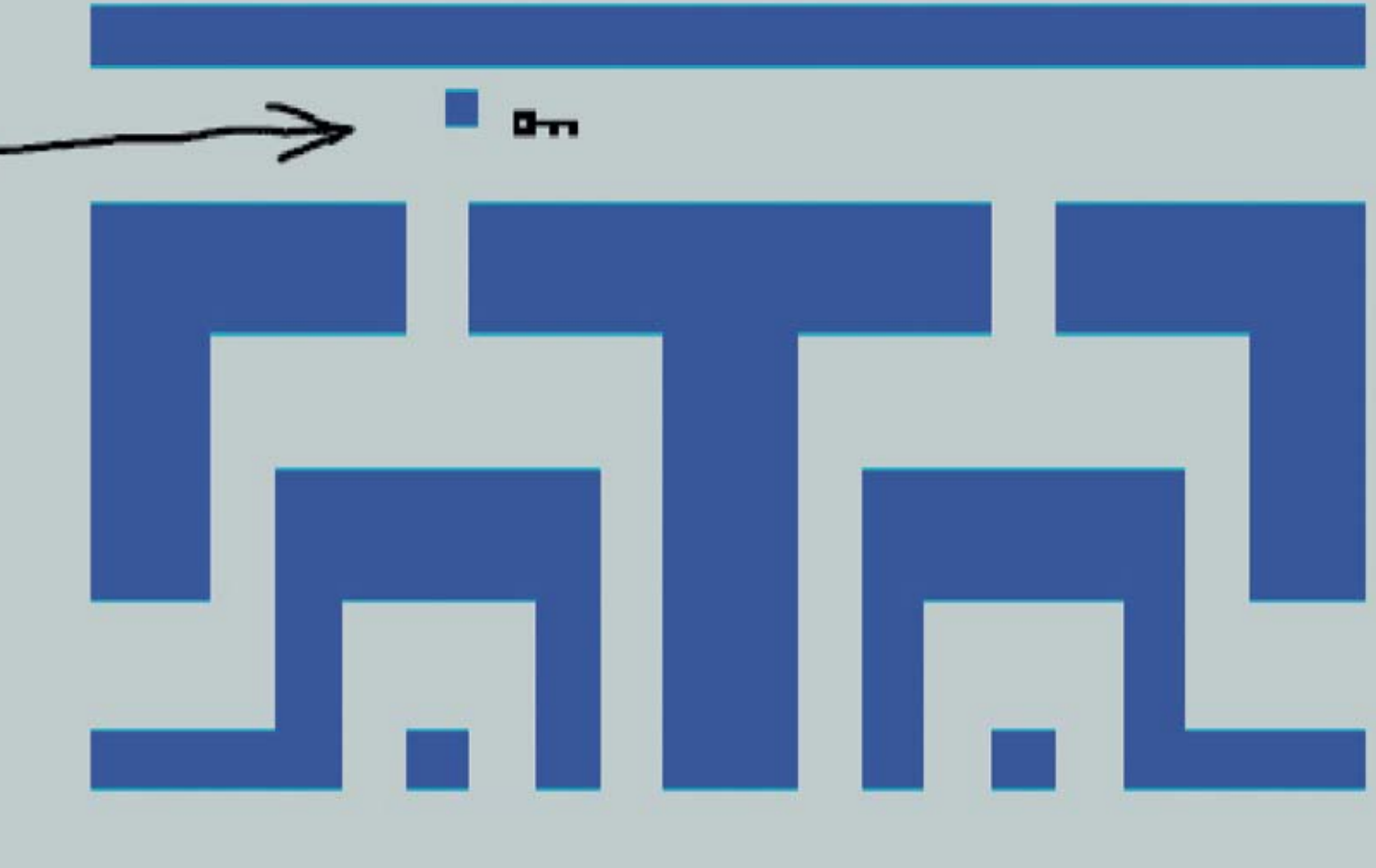
"Gaming lifestyle is not just what commercial game companies think it is; wearing an Atari T-shirt or watching G4 Television [video game cable channel in the States]. It's about realising that – like other media – game culture and fandom is a very intimate and meaningful part of people's lives. For example, if you have a particular revelation while playing Tetris when you are in the hospital paralysed from the waist down, and Tetris becomes your way of experimenting with space for the time being (an actual article in issue one of *1-Up*), then Tetris can be a way of relating to the world. Or if, as a girl growing up, you identified with a particular female avatar in *Street Fighter 2*, that avatar forms part of your identity, in the same way that people relate to characters in books or films. I'm interested in making those connections with the ways games can relate to greater everyday life, and how we make sense of it."

Are non-gamers or occasional gamers interested in reading video games writing?

"Non-gamers are not interested in reading traditional games journalism because it's not about a relatable experience – it's full of specs, reviews, and references to other games. It's a very insular kind of writing. I am really flattered when non-gaming people, especially girls, pick up *1-Up*, because I realise that there is a way to relate games to the world outside that is interesting and accessible. There is an interdisciplinary world of art and experience out there, and games are part of it."

www.1up-zine.com

* Not really.



bust a move too

Words: **Kieron Gillen**

We missed Peaches on Dance Dance Revolution. That'd be too much to ask for. Or maybe it's more perfect inside our heads. Our very own Bacchanalian Queen of the Fucking doing the ol' forward-back-forward on the dance-pad before mounting the machine in some post-human transcendent cyber-orgasm? Well, nothing that reality could offer can match our fevered imaginings.

It could have been weirder. We're told that, last time he was here, Will Oldham climbed aboard the same game and followed the footsteps of Konami's rhythm diktats. It's hard to go back to a normal life in possession of such facts.

We're at Camber Sands holiday camp at All Tomorrow's Parties' Nightmare Before Christmas. We're here to play videogames. Well, we're here to listen to something bracing and atonal but occasionally, at some point in the early morning when we're locked in a life or death battle with a Whittaker's gambling machine, we forget this.

Step back a little. While every review of Britain's most gratingly elitist music festival dwells upon the absolute surreality of its Sixties New Britain by way of concentration camp vibe, few have discussed the dark secret that lies between the two stages. A fully functional arcade, stocked with a mixture of barely functioning game cabinets and baroque mechanical gambling paraphernalia from some distant time.

So, for those moments when white noise is just sounding like plain noise, you find bewildered bearded folk gathered around machines, just... playing. It's a slice of gaming in its natural habitat,

and Pontins' collection of artefacts oddly illustrates the progression of gaming across the 20th Century. And it's time we reclaimed pre-microchip mechanical games into the family of the videogame – henceforth rechristened 'Automated Techno Games' (© *Plan B*, 2004).

What matters more? The sensation a game provides or the means by which it provides them? To argue the latter would make us fall into something analogous to Rockist Dogma, and we don't want to do that. We'd end up smelling bad, or something.

So, on Sunday afternoon, we catch somebody who appears to be in The Fall, boredly rolling two-pence pieces down a slowly rising and falling ramp. If he hits it right, the coin will fly through a hoop. If he does that, the machine will print out sufficient tickets to use as an improvised Bandoleer. These can be exchanged at a shop for prizes, including a disturbing racist statuette of a black gentleman, face twisted in a grotesque parody of being off his tits thanks to the enormous pipe he's smoking. It's not a complex game, but it hits emotional buttons that are universally comprehensible. *Anyone could play it.*

But arcades got confused along the way. By the late Eighties, apart from the games-as-rollercoasters (where the pneumatic cabinet was more the point than what you were actually doing), one-on-one fighting games dominated. These games were devoted to the memorisation of arcane and baroque rituals that would make random stereotypical characters batter the living daylight out of each other. To enjoy these, you had to speak the gaming equivalent of Latin. They were, essentially, games for elitist fascists who were scared of the world intruding on their little idyll.

Then came the all-singing all-dancing Dance Dance Revolution revolution. If you're reading this, you'll have seen a dancing game being played. But to see it in the context of a festival, with artists and fans just *playing*, and gathering crowds to gape and grin, reveals it as the re-democratisation of gaming.

So the arcade is about gaming disseminated among the populace rather than jealously hoarded by an elite too bitter to enjoy what's good for them.

We're at Camber Sands. We're here to play videogames

It's as natural as a smile, so we invite the whole campsite back to our chalet to play Singstar Party. If dancing games are like a more ordered form of democracy with checks and balances based on the physical skill required to play, Singstar is freeform anarcho-syndicalism in its purest state. The players sing into a microphone and the game guides and rates their progress, it's like karaoke but more so. It's exceptionally generous, awarding fairly high scores to even the most atonal yelping, thus encouraging everybody to get involved. So everybody does.

At some point around six am on the Monday, we find ourselves trying to bully passing members of Mountain Men Anonymous into singing 'Ace Of Spades'. Games as part of life. No big deal, which is the biggest deal gaming's had for a while.

It feels like Tomorrow's Party, today.

books



my back pages

Words: **Katrina Howat**Illustration: **Andrew Clare****Richard Brautigan**

We live in an age when every lost, forgotten or unhailed gem seems to have been rescued, rediscovered and given its bit part in history. We can't help ourselves. The allure of a dead hero grips us more than even those heroes who seem destined to be dead before their time.

But Richard Brautigan is a tricky one, an unpopular choice – a white male whose time came and went with the counterculture of west coast Sixties America. When he shot out the numbers on the clock in his house, and then shot himself at the age of 49 in 1984, he was neither young nor beautiful nor even fast-living. His alcoholism, depression and deathwish (he told his nine-year-old daughter one bedtime that he hadn't expected to reach 30) were not even rock'n'roll.

No matter. Brautigan's life and work mattered then and they matter now. At once whimsical and dark (death lurks behind the peace and love in even the gentlest of his works), his timeless, singularly haiku-like style refutes his soundbite categorisation as hippie ephemera. Haruki Murakami has cited him as a huge influence, while the value of even his paperback editions has been sent soaring by collectors on eBay. Thanks to reissues of his works, most recently by Canongate, it's getting easier to find Brautigan fans. And all his fans are passionate about him: that's the kind of author he is.

Born in Tacoma, Washington, he grew up in a fatherless household, so poor that he collected bottles for pennies. Escaping to San Francisco in the mid-Fifties, he became part of the Beat scene. He married and had a daughter, but was at most a minor local poet until the success of his 1967 novel *Trout Fishing In America*. A road trip along rural waterways that recalled Walden and Thoreau in celebrating the beauty of pre-consumer landscapes, this book gave its name to an underground newspaper and a free school. But hero worship was a burden for Brautigan; divorced, and retreated to a ranch on Montana. A visit to Japan in the mid-Seventies gave him a new lease of life and a new wife, but when the marriage broke down he returned to Montana for the last years of his life.

In between, he turned out essays, poems and a further 11 novels, their titles only the start of their wry, wondrous fictional journeys. *In Watermelon Sugar*; *A Confederate General From Big Sur*; *Willard And His Bowling Trophies*; *The Hawkline Monster: A Gothic Western*.

The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966 even inspired an online library to match that of the one in the novel, where anyone can contribute their unpublished works. Start there or start with *Revenge Of The Lawn*, ideally discovered in a dusty secondhand bookshop. You'll find your own way, just like Brautigan did.



Intellectual weirdness is built into the title



feline tongues and chicken visions

Words: **Katrina Howat****Kafka On The Shore****Haruki Murakami (Harvill)**

A teenage narrator, not unlike Holden Caulfield, on an Oedipal odyssey. A simple, Zen-like soul who can speak cat language and make leeches and mackerel rain from the sky. A consciousness-raising vision which takes the form of Kentucky Fried Chicken's icon, Colonel Sanders.

Intellectual weirdness is built into the title. Intellectual weirdness is what you get. But there's far more than this in Murakami's latest work. For readers familiar with this best-selling Japanese author, *Kafka On The Shore* retreads familiar territory – the phantasmagoric blurring of reality and surreal dreams, the metaphysical

tackling of inner and outer worlds, time, memory, identity and love, the laws of physics turned topsy-turvy and, not least of all, the hallucinatory characters.

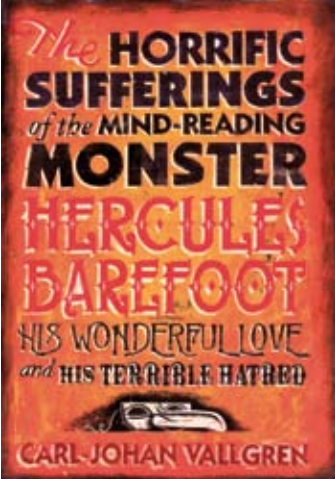
Murakami's troubled 15-year-old protagonist loner, Kafka Tamura, runs away from his father in search of his mother, his sister, and himself. He ends up in an odd private library in the distant town of Takamatsu, dealing with his demons through a series of bizarre dramas and strange entanglements with kind-hearted strangers. The parallel story of Nakata, the old man who speaks cat, unfolds along the way. It starts with the murder of local cats by an evil spirit called Johnnie Walker,

and ends with the discovery of an entrance stone connecting Kafka and Nakata to each other and to a new spiritual dimension.

It's the kind of mind-melding fictional labyrinth that makes Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* read like *Janet And John*. A spellbinding marriage of our fascination with the paranormal, new age ideas, gothic fantasy and pop culture, it's equal parts joyous escapism, imagination fuel and brain-stagnating rescue remedy (complete with references to Rousseau, Edison, Japanese folklore and even a Hegel-quoting prostitute).

Looking for the best new writing? Look east.

The Horrific Sufferings Of The Mind-Reading Monster Hercules Barefoot: His Wonderful Love And His Terrible Hatred
Carl-Johan Vallgren (Harvill)



Superfreak Hercules Barefoot is a hairier, more demonic-looking version of ET, with a wordless gash where his mouth should be and a head covered in “*protuberances reminiscent of fossilised snails*”. Forced to leave the whorehouse of his birth in search of his “*beautiful love*” Henriette, he scours Europe’s freakshows, asylums and monasteries – all the while tailed by a cabal of murderous clerics who are threatened by this midget’s powers of perception.

While the plot might be too much like Patrick Suskind’s *Perfume*, *Hercules Barefoot* also shares *Perfume*’s sensual evocation of a world as brutally medieval as it is Napoleonic. It veers energetically in its subject matter from the moral turpitude of the Swedes and the history of Sign Language to the nature of possession, and, in the end, the redemptive power of love. And it’s hard to dislike a story that features a proto-Marxist cyclops.

Alice Rooney

Sniper
Pavel Hak (Serpent’s Tail)



Brutality, inhumanity, terror, degradation abound in Hak’s novella portrait of an unspecified country at war with an unnamed enemy. Short, sharp chapters ricochet between the psychotic ramblings of a sniper on a hilltop, the casual barbarism of soldiers and the desperate actions of those caught up in the crossfire.

Fugitives climb over a mountain of bodies to get to the border. A man digs his family out of a mass grave. Raped women take

vicious revenge on their captors. Even the dead find a way to rebel against their fate. And Hak rages against the bestiality of a war driven by “*Saint Oil, Saint Business, Saint Kapital*”. This isn’t just fiction, it’s polemic, punctuated with poetic images that brand themselves on your brain. “*A hand with cut-off fingers slips out of a hole, a leg bone rises out of the cracked coat of ice.*” It could be Iraq, Sudan, Croatia. It could be here. That’s the point.

Melody Dove

The Man With The Golden Arm
Nelson Algren (Canongate)



Algren’s downward spiralling tale of poker-playing junkie drummer Frankie Machine in Depression-era Chicago gets yet another reissue, but there can never be too many of these. If you’ve heard of it, most likely it’s the Fifties film adaptation starring Frank Sinatra (Hollywood’s first overt venture into the world of the smackhead), but Algren’s original novel is a far denser, more complex beast. His portrait of Thirties slum-living is more than a voyeuristic Tom Wolfe trip. This was his world. As Studs Terkel says in his new afterword (Kurt Vonnegut contributes a new foreword), Algren, despite winning awards and acclaim, was a “*poor man, living among the poor*”. A drinking, gambling skid row regular, he saw its brutal realities and the dreams of those wanting to escape. Both are represented in this lyrical, hard-hitting story, as it tracks the fate of Frankie and others as they struggle to find a way out and end up getting stomped back down by the system every time.

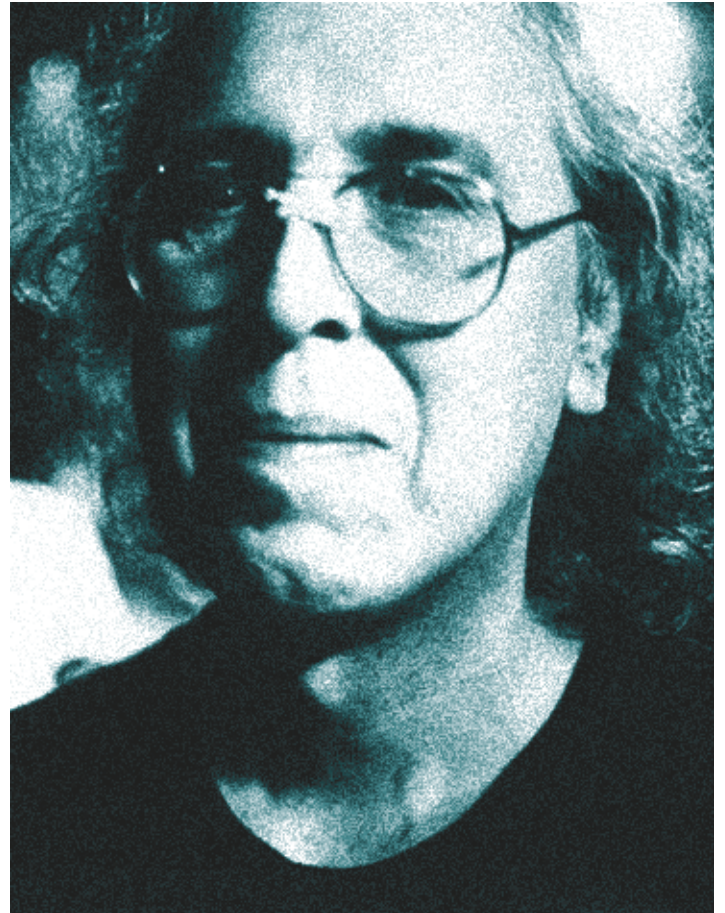
Melody Dove

The Trouble With Music
Mat Callahan (AK Press)

If you’re one of those folk who try to avoid succumbing to the mass-produced fodder that passes for music in the mainstream, then Mat Callahan’s portrayal of a crisis in the industry may simply make you shrug your shoulders before you return to downloading or uploading your music for free.

But, from Nirvana repackaged as lift muzak to the manufactured misery of *Pop Idol*, everyone is affected by what’s happening with music today. Music is fundamental to existence, says Callahan, and it’s down to music lovers to wrest it from corporate control. Forgotten how music gets in your gut and sends you soaring? Callahan’s impassioned critique will make you remember.

Melody Dove



One Man & His Bog
(ed Paul Jackson, www.theadelphi.com)

In 2003, towards the end of *Careless Talk Costs Lives*’ run, I played a show with Bristol’s wiry Playwrights at Hull’s Adelphi – a former working man’s club set in an unprepossessing suburban street where kids run wild in the back alley, offering brambleberries to musicians and collecting autographs just in case. Due to a mix-up, we showed up three days late and shared a bill with a jazz-fusion band from down the road: between us, we pulled in precisely eight punters, one of which was a black-shirted David McNamee. The evening was so fun! Paul Jackson, the club’s proprietor, wasn’t in the least bit fazed by the lack of numbers: and the evening quickly degenerated into a haze of bad pool, bad cocktails, improvised gospel and waltzing to The Langley Schools Music Project.

For 20 years now, thanks to the enthusiasm and stubborn nature of Mr Jackson, Adelphi has been a mainstay of the UK ‘toilet circuit’. It started in October 1984, as a gay club with a gangster clientele, switching to live music as nights dissolved in violence. By 1985, such legendary names as John Robb’s fearsome proto-grunge Membranes, Bogshed, Age Of Chance, Shop Assistants and – most famously – The Housemartins were gigging there. (The Housemartins signed their Go! Discs contract on stage at the Adelphi, June ‘85.) The list of bands who’ve suffered the Adelphi’s rudimentary ‘dressing room’ (a corridor at the side of the stage) and abysmal toilet facilities include Carter USM (who broke the house record), Radiohead, Pavement, Kingmaker, Edible 50ft Smiths and Death By Milkfloat – most of which feature on the two free CDs, 39 tracks that accompany this book alongside a whole bunch of bands you’ve never heard of, of course.

One of the greatest Babes In Toyland shows I ever saw was here: likewise, The Pastels (supported by both Jad Fair and The Legend!). It’s all about context. And the context of such a club existing in such a place is hard to beat.

It’s difficult to overestimate the importance of the Adelphi – struggling week in week out to make ends meet – as a community centre, and conduit for live music. Within this book’s 180 pages, musicians and former bar staff line up to pay tribute to both Mr Jackson and unforgettable shows – from Supergrass to a Jeffrey Lewis comic strip, The Stone Roses, music schools and world music. It was cobbled together over the space of 12 weeks: but the DIY spirit serves its subject well – any glossier approach would’ve been absurd.

The book itself serves a dual function (much as the venue always has): both celebration and political statement. After surviving two decades, the club now faces the imminent threat of Public Entertainment Licencing legislation – which will force its closure sometime this year. This should not be allowed to happen.

People often don’t realise what they have till it’s gone.

Everett True

music that time forgot



the real hipsters

Words: **Doug Mosurock**
Illustration: **Marcus Oakley**

Hackamore Brick

One Kiss Leads To Another (Kama Sutra; r. 1970)

My friends and I call Bedford Avenue, the main drag of the hipster nexus that is Williamsburg, Brooklyn, by its deserving nickname: Clown Alley. It's Clown Alley because life and circumstance is secretly clowning most people who presently live and hang out there, bouncing cheques, leveraging credibility, and acting like jackasses seven days a week. Every manner of douchebag and jagoff can be found clogging Williamsburg's sidewalks, chain-smoking, donning ill-advised outfits, garish makeup, piercings and tattoos, some sniffing the drip back into their noses, jamming their bodies into the L train and feigning indifference. It's like a giant dormitory for young executives, art students, and the children of that top 2% that benefit from Bush's tax cuts.

This is Williamsburg in 2004. Williamsburg in 1954 looked like an episode of *The Honeymooners*. That puts Hackamore Brick, a rock'n'roll band that we can call Williamsburg's first hipster notion, in a virtual No Man's Land. If we extrapolate that the neighborhood bottomed out in, say, 1989, that places the band's late Sixties/early Seventies existence halfway down the slope.

Finding the value in such an environment, instead of, say, SoHo, sets the bar for these guys so far above the crowd at an Interpol show, or even a Liars show, that the bar is no longer visible without a powerful telescope. But we can do even better: there was a Velvet Underground fan club back then, called the Venus In Furs Society, which members of Hackamore Brick founded. So what if you went to the secret Interpol show and you used to go drinking with Karen O? Hackamore Brick, without question, used to go see the Velvets perform on the regular. Without the VU, there'd be no you reading this magazine right now. Stick that in your crack pipe and smoke it.

It's been said if only a thousand people went out and bought the Velvets' records, that each and every one of them started a band. Consider Hackamore Brick the first. But because they were first, their legacy has gone largely undocumented. There is

no record, for instance, of any bands containing members of Hackamore Brick before or after their brief moment in the sun. They were signed to NYC's Kama Sutra label, virtually hitless since its inception with The Lovin' Spoonful, and between KS and its sister label, Buddah, which moved from bubblegum pop to virtual obscurity with some forward-thinking but mostly winless signings like The Flamin' Groovies and Captain Beefheart. That Williamsburg thing? It's merely assumed that the band lived in that area of Brooklyn. There were a handful of compatriots from the Better Borough, proto-metallars Sir Lord Baltimore, and Hackamore Brick's labelmates Dust, featuring a pre-Ramones Marc Bell; however, SLB were from Bensonhurst and, given the hirsuteness of Dust's members, they probably were too.

The first bona fide American punk rock song

Only one Hackamore Brick review from the time of their album's release has lasted into the digital age; a fairly cryptic essay written for *Rolling Stone* by Richard Meltzer, who also hints that they were nominated for a Grammy in 1970, though no accessible information exists to back this claim up. It's also been said that the lack of a permanent drummer kept their live shows to a minimum. And to top it all, their album has been out of print presumably since its release. Your best bet is finding a copy on eBay, and your turntable had best be in working order if you intend to listen to it at all.

And it's a shame, because *One Kiss Leads To Another* is a hidden jewel in the terrain of Seventies rock music. The band bind the polite chug and sentimentality of the Velvets' third, self-titled album with the sky-limit freedom and open chord salvos of

Loaded. For an album of mostly ballads, their sound is endlessly hopeful and blessed with relevance and charm well beyond their years.

Frontmen and songwriters Chick Newman and Tommy Moonlight split the difference between the 10 tracks. Newman pens the heartbreaking opener 'Reachin' – about self-doubt and, possibly, the fear of getting drafted – with a soaring vocal turn in the middle. Moonlight's 'Oh! Those Sweet Bananas' gets things off to a solid start, with a confident, rolling guitar riff and Lou Reed-esque vocals that find themselves in a sweet counterpoint harmony by the verse. He also references "*vege-tables*" in a way that lets us know that he knew about *Smile* before any of us did. Oh, to be this well-rounded, and – even better – to jump into 'I Watched You Rhumba', a song worthy of endless praise. Its gorgeously pounding piano breaks into a rinky-dink organ line so perfectly in the bridge that college degrees should be based around its genius.

More conventional sounds dominate side two, but don't write them off. 'Got A Gal Named Wilma' kicks things off with more vocal harmonies and some fluff love-song lyrics, before dissolving into the buzzing organ basher 'I Won't Be Around', and overlong, solo-filled jazz odyssey 'And I Wonder'.

Closer 'Zip Gun Woman' is possibly the first bona fide American punk rock song, with only the limits of performance and the attitude of punk rock missing from its mean riffs, bulletproof construction and seething rage. It comes barreling out, throwing blame at the woman who done them wrong, with the kind of half-regarded, sleepy angst that The Modern Lovers would break out with a few years later; with the groundwork that would allow The Mirrors, The Electric Eels, and Rocket From The Tombs to make their mark in '75.

Despite its copious strengths, *One Kiss Leads To Another* failed to make a dent in the pantheon of pop. It's now up to you to give it a good home, and let its unmatched good vibes and strength guide you out of the path of loserdom from here on out. Create something beautiful; throw it into the void. Just like Hackamore Brick did.

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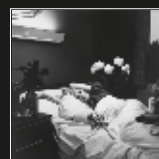
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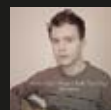
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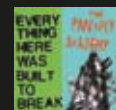
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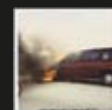
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